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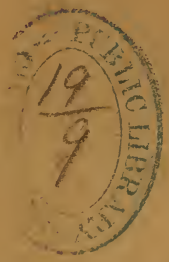

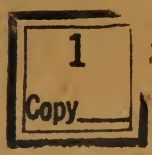

ATHELSTAN,

A Tragedy.

LIFE AND DEATH, AN ALLEGORY,

AND OTHER POEMS.

BY EDMUND H. WHITE,

GUARD, GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY.

Price Five Shillings.

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By EDMUND H. WHITE,

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LONDON:

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TO HIS GRACE

THE DUKE OF BEAUFORT,

THIS VOLUME IS, BY PERMISSION, MOST RESPECTFULLY

Dedicated,

BY HIS GRACE'S MOST OBEDIENT,

HUMBLE,

AND VERY DUTIFUL SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

In presenting this volume to the public, I beg leave most respectfully to thank the numerous subscribers, for the kind manner in which they came forward, with the most generous liberality, to assist me in my undertaking; and, although I am aware of the deep responsibility I have incurred in thus venturing upon the already fully occupied field of literature, I trust that my humble efforts will not be deemed utterly useless. Doubtless there are many persons who will consider it absurd for a man born and reared in humble circumstances, to attempt to thrust himself forward upon the notice of the public; believing, as they do, that an all-wise Creator has conferred upon the sons of honest industry no other talent than that of earning their bread by the sweat of their brow; but, let it be remembered, that when the primeval curse was bestowed upon man, there was no distinction made by that dread Judge, in his universal sentence: the curse was addressed to no distinct class, colour, or creed, but to the whole

human race. Nor can it be denied that from amongst the lower orders of the people some of the brightest and most glorious of God's living images have sprung, and why should they not? Is not the same heaven above them, and the same earth beneath them? Is not the illimitable light which beams in the azure sky, shed alike on the highest and the lowest of created beings? Doth not the mighty ocean receive many tributary streams from sources whose origin is, in appearance, too contemptible to meet a single glance from the unthinking and unobservant eye; and shall man, alone, be denied the privilege that is granted to universal nature by its Almighty Founder? No!

For *He* who sits upon the august throne
Of heaven's eternal vault, and looketh down
Upon poor sinful man, alone can tell
What boundless thoughts do in his bosom dwell;
Thoughts, which long smouldering, burst forth into
flame,
And erst have gain'd a plebeian lasting fame.

That such a result will follow my humble efforts, I have not the ridiculous vanity to imagine; but having for some years been a contributor to a cheap periodical, and having generally found my contributions willingly accepted, without ever receiving the slightest remuneration for them, my friends (many of whom move in a far different sphere to that in

which it hath been my lot to be cast) have frequently urged me to publish on my own account; and with a feeling of doubt, not altogether unmixed with a slight ray of hope, for the result, I have acquiesced in their wishes; and being perfectly aware that apologies will neither add to nor diminish the value of these pages, they are most respectfully presented to the subscribers and the public, by

Their most obedient,

and very humble servant,

THE AUTHOR.

The Author's Address to the Critics.

OH, ye stern critics, who, with grey goose quill,
Cut up poor authors with downright good will,
Methinks, e'en now, I see your awful frown,
And hear ye mutter "*Pho!* the *boor*, the *clown!*
The untaught knave, the ignoramus, yet
Hath scarcely learn'd to con his alphabet!"
Gramercy, sirs, 'tis very true, that I
Have ne'er yet gazed upon Italia's sky;
Nor have I drank from out the precious stream
Of classic lore, the poet's loftiest theme;

Nor Cam, nor *Isis*, ever deign'd for me
Provide a dinner, or more humble tea.
Untaught I am, save that I've cast mine eye
O'er all creation's works—earth, sea, and sky;
And in each cloud which o'er my head doth lour,
Behold the semblance of Almighty pow'r.
Is this a crime?—if 'tis, sirs, then let me
Brave all the malice of your enmity;
But if to soar above the common herd,
And let my simple strains be feebly heard,
Is not a crime, unfitting me for heav'n,
By man, at least, I trust to be forgiv'n.
Yet, if I err, at least, sweet gentles, look,
And, ere you do condemn, pray read my book.

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ATHELSTAN:

AN HISTORICAL TRAGEDY,

IN FIVE ACTS.

CHARACTERS REPRESENTED.

ATHELSTAN, King of Britain.
TURKETAL, Chancellor.
ALTHEOF, a Warrior Bishop.
KENT, ESSEX, } English Lords.
CEDRIC, a Soldier attached to Essex.
SITHRIC, a Danish Noble, afterwards King of Northumbria.
ANLAF, GODFRID, } Sithric's Sons.
OSCAR, GLENDIG, } Welsh Princes.
MANFRID, WULFSTAN, } Danish Chiefs.

EDITHA, Sister to Athelstan, afterwards Queen of Northumbria.
ELGIVA, Waiting Woman to Editha.

English and Danish Soldiers, &c. &c. &c.

Period, 928 and 929, A.D.

ATHELSTAN.

ACT I.

SCENE I. — *Interior of Athelstan's Castle* — ATHELSTAN (*solus.*)

ATHELSTAN.

It must be so: then shall fair Britain rest
From war's rude turmoil, and her sons enjoy
The sweets of calm repose: then may our reign
Shed lasting blessings o'er our sea-girt isle!
Ha, see, who comes!

Enter TURKETAL.

Turketal, in our thoughts
Thou wert but now; thy policy we've ta'en
Into our deep consideration, glanced
With anxious eye o'er all its bearings, and
At length become a convert.

TURKETAL.

Your grace will then adopt my policy;
And yielding up a part, secure the whole?

ATHELSTAN.

Heaven grant it so, Turketal! May thy words
Prophetic prove! Oh, may no luckless star

Cast gloom o'er these fair prospects! may our land
Be free from war and turmoil, and her sons
Enjoy those blessings we would fain bestow!

TURKETAL.

Doubt not, my liege, it will be so. I feel
The spirit of sweet concord rise within
My trembling breast; grant, Heaven, sweet Peace may rest
Once more on this fair isle; bid discord cease,
And teach her stubborn sons to cast aside
The instruments of war; then will this land
Pour forth in rich profusion all her stores
Of hidden wealth, to bless the hand that dives
Into her earthly womb.

Enter KENT *and* ESSEX.

ATHELSTAN.

Welcome, my lords—right welcome! We have need
Of thy good counsel, and our chancellor
Will, in brief words, explain our utmost wish.

TURKETAL.

His grace, my lords, will list unto our prayers,
And end this awful discord, that too long
Hath rent fair Britain, and destroy'd her sons.
The Princes sEditha, that beauteous maid,
Whom Heaven in mercy sent us at our need,
Will seal the solemn compact, and become
The wife of Sithric, and Northumbria's queen.

KENT.

Heaven's blessings rest upon her! May her days

Be days of joy; her nights blest with repose—
The choicest gift bestow'd on mortals; ills
Fly from her lovely presence; may the joys
That nature cast around her parent's couch
On her bright natal morn, e'er shed their beams
O'er her illustrious head. Oh, may she be,
In ages yet to come, renown'd as free
From all the vices of her gentle sex.

ATHELSTAN.

A goodly wish, my lord. What! Essex dumb
In a fair lady's praise? My lord, I deem
The fair Editha and you are not friends.

ESSEX.

Pardon, your grace; I am not free of speech,
But actions speak the man. Let me be judged
E'en by my deeds, and if they prove me false
To Editha, or any of her sex,
However high or humble they may be,
Your grace may cast dishonour on my shield.

ATHELSTAN.

It needs not, Essex, for thy tongue to speak
Thy manly virtues or heroic deeds;
Right well we know thee faithful, just, and true;
To honour's cause, and to our hearts thou'rt dear.
But come, my lords, be seated! Let us cast
All jesting to the winds, for idle words
But speak of idle deeds. Let ours be such
As tend to the improvement of our race.

(ATHELSTAN *and* LORDS *sit down in deliberation.*)

ATHELSTAN (*rising.*)

Even so, my lord ; haste to Northumbria,
And say to Sithric thus : We have resolved
To crown him King of all Northumberland,
Subject to us as suzerain and lord.
Say, that to bind our interests in one bond
Of godlike brotherhood, we do incline
To offer him our sister for his bride ;
Then, if he should reject our proffer, say,
We soon will quell his stubborn pride, and lay
The guilt of all the blood that may be shed,
In most unrighteous warfare, on his head.

KENT.

My liege, I will conform me to your wish,
And doubt not my success. The fiery Dane
Is warm and generous, and his valiant heart
Too soft and tender to resist the boon
Graciously offered. Lovely Editha,
Who needs but to be seen, to raise a flame
Of fervent passion in brave Sithric's breast,
Will soon lead the old warrior in her chains,
An all too willing captive to her charms.

ATHELSTAN.

And you, my Lord of Essex, will with Kent,
To aid him with your counsel, should the Dane
Refuse consent to this our mild behest.

ESSEX.

I am your grace's servant, and in this,
As in aught else, am ready to obey ;

But think, my liege, ere yet the die is cast,
The evils that the Lady Editha
May in this compact suffer, should her heart
Decline to shed its sweets upon the Dane.

TURKETAL.

His grace hath well considered, noble Essex,
All that your words imply; but regal dames
Must sacrifice those feelings that oft sway
The minds of virgins of ignoble birth.

ESSEX.

Is't well, my lord, that you should thus advise?
For, oh, bethink you, should aught evil fall
Upon the head of that illustrious maid;
Should blighted hopes and sear'd affection fail
To win for Britain peace, or should the Dane,
Once wedded to fair Editha, forget
The value of the jewel that is cast
Forth from her native home, her gentle heart
Would burst with pain and anguish, and the end
Of all your hopes meet with unwholesome blight.

ATHELSTAN.

Believe us, gentle Essex, we have weigh'd
The various arguments for and against
This union of our sister and the Dane.

ESSEX.

'Tis well, my liege: I've said. My voice no more
Shall raise its echo 'gainst thy policy—
(*Aside*) Which rends my heart in twain with maddening grief!

ATHELSTAN.

Adieu, my lords! Then, when the morrow's sun
Doth cast his rays o'er our fair mother earth,
You'll hie you to the Dane, and mark him well,
While you recount our offers of free grace?

KENT.

We will, my liege. I humbly take my leave.

ESSEX.

Adieu, my liege.

[*Exit* ATHELSTAN, TURKETAL, *and* KENT.

ESSEX, (*solus.*)

My curse on thee, Turketal, and thy craft!
For thee to live in vile, luxurious ease,
The fair Editha must be offer'd up,
A living sacrifice. Immortal Mars,
Look down upon this sublunary sphere!
Behold how evil spirits walk the earth,
And to exchange thy glorious wreaths for peace,
Betray soft beauty to the foul embrace
Of aged dotards, and thus rob the young
Of all that makes life precious—dash the cup
Of joy with the polluted bitterness
Of earthly wealth and grandeur, whilst the heart
Is robbed of its intrinsic worth, becomes
A living sepulchre of transient joys,
Whose fleeting moments cast o'er all the earth
A glorious radiance, while their magic voice
Was heard in every gently murmur'd sigh.
Oh, Editha! thou wonder of the world,

And art thou doom'd to perish 'neath the shrine
Of the old dotard's policy—become
Nurse to an old, decrepit, feeble Dane !
Great God ! who rides amid the whirlwinds, blast
Me with your thunderbolts, or rive the earth
In countless atoms—render into chaos
Earth, sea, and sky ; or bid the sun to shine
No more upon creation's wondrous works !
For all will now in this torn breast be dark
As midnight's solemn hour. [*Exit.*

Enter EDITHA *and* ELGIVA.

ELGIVA.

I pray you, madam, calm your troubled breast ;
The king will surely listen to your prayers.

EDITHA.

Oh, Elgiva, thou knowest not the power
The great Turketal wields. Oh, Athelstan !
My brother and my king, what have I done,
That I should thus be sacrificed ? Fond heart,
Oh, lie you still, nor burst in twain with grief
Ere I behold my Essex once again ! (*Weeps.*)

ELGIVA.

Oh, dearest madam, weep not thus. My eyes
Are full to overflowing, and my heart
So torn with rage and anguish, I could rend
The cold heart out of old Turketal's breast,
And hurl it to the howling wolves, whose cries
Are more melodious to my ears than are
The tones of that old stern and crafty man !

EDITHA.

Alas! my Elgiva, he has a power
Within his subtle breast of bending all
My kingly brother's passions to his will.
Let him but say, Do this! and lo! 'tis done,
Though heaven and earth alike forbid the deed!

(*Enter* ESSEX.)

Oh, Essex! art thou come to cheer my heart,
And bid me not despair? Say, has the king
Relaxed in cruel policy, and freed
Me from that galling yoke of slavery,
More dreadful than the fetters that entwine
Around the outward form? whose gnawing rends
In twain the chords that bind us, heart to heart
And soul to soul, in love's sweet sympathy!

ESSEX.

Oh, thou much injured and oppressed fair,
How shall I curb my tongue, how teach my heart
To stay its wonted gush of tenderness,
Which rushes madly through my burning veins,
Consuming in its course all obstacles
That loyalty and honour should call forth
From the recesses of my o'erwrought brain,
And bid me fly thy presence! I could weep
And play the whining schoolboy till my tears,
Like molten lead, coursed down my furrow'd cheeks,
And burnt their way into my heaving breast,
Robbing it of each particle of life
That fell despair hath left.

EDITHA.

And must we part? Oh, Essex! can I live,
And not again behold thee!—never more
Gaze on thy godlike form, read in thine eye
The love thou bearest the wretched Editha!
And must we—must we part?

ESSEX.

Great God, who rul'st the world, what have I done
That thus I am chastised?—whom have I wronged?
What wondrous deed of guilt lies on my soul,
That I should thus be tortured? Have I sinn'd
Past all redemption?—has my hand been steep'd
In guiltless blood, or have I raised a blush
On a pure virgin's cheek—destroy'd the hopes
Of aged sire or widow'd matron—raised
My voice against my country, king, or God?
How have I sinned, that thus all earthly hopes,
At one fell swoop, should vanish from my sight,
Leaving a sightless void, an endless night,
Where all was bright, and beautiful, and clear,
As early morning's dawn? Oh, Editha!
Thou best and loveliest of thy gentle sex,
For whom all nature weeps—in whose dear form
Each grace resplendent shines; in whose bright orbs
The lovely sky's soft azure is express'd;
Whose cheeks outvie in beauty the sweet rose,
Whose odorous fragrance fades beneath thy breath,
More soft and balmy than the sweet perfume
That rises from the rich and gay parterre.

Oh, can I live
And not again hear thy soft voice repeat,
In tones of sweetest minstrelsy, my name,
Whose magic lingers on my ravish'd ears,
Bringing a world of joy into my heart
Too great to be endured! (*Embraces her.*)

EDITHA.

And must I teach my heart
To stay its wonted beatings, and mine eyes
To shun the lustre of thy sparkling orbs!
Oh, God! this is too much.
Why was I born
To be the the idle sport of fortune?—rear'd
In princely halls,—each wish, ere form'd, drawn forth
But to be gratified—my sinful self
Held up to an admiring throng, as one
Fit only to be worshipp'd,—now cast down
Into the very depths of dire despair!

ESSEX.

Alas, my love! my heart's fond idol; I
Have lived too long—to see my darling hopes
Dash'd from my fever'd lips: how can I cheer,
Your drooping heart, when mine with fury burns
At these your great and most unheard of wrongs?

ELGIVA.

Madam, the king!—behold, he comes this way.

EDITHA.

Oh, heavens, Essex! whither will you fly?

ESSEX.

Fear not for me, sweet Editha; my life
Is now not worth the keeping: I could die,
And bless the hand that dealt the friendly stroke.

EDITHA.

Oh, Essex! you must live,—let not your blood
Lie on my soul! Oh, fly!—I pray you, fly!

ESSEX.

One last embrace, thou dear one, ere I go;
I would not lose it for ten thousand lives.

EDITHA.

Oh, Essex! noble, best beloved of men,
Heaven's blessing rest upon you! Fly—oh, fly!
(*Embracing.*)

ESSEX.

Dearest, I go; may Heaven's choicest gifts
Be shower'd in mercy o'er thy beauteous head!
[*Exit.*

ELGIVA.

See, madam—see; they come! Will you retire,
Or will you here await my lord the king?

EDITHA.

Alas, Elgiva! I cannot retreat;
My limbs refuse their office. Ha! he comes.
(*Sits down.*)

Enter ATHELSTAN, TURKETAL, *and* ALTHEOF.

ATHELSTAN.

You see, lord bishop, that our hopes are laid

Upon a sure foundation : peace restored,
Our islanders will flourish ; nature's stores
Will flow in rich abundance o'er the earth,
And bounteous Heaven smile upon our reign.

ALTHEOF.

Sure Heaven itself compassionates our isle,
To send such thoughts into your royal breast ;
Already do I see the bounteous earth,
In rich luxuriance gladden every heart ;
Methinks I gaze into the womb of time,
And see the earth deck'd out with luscious corn,
Whose waving fields, embrownèd by the sun,
Glittering like radiant gold, doth fill the heart
With silent thankfulness, while lowing herds
Graze on the vernal slopes, or playful skip
Around the wide and lovely range of fields,
Whose verdure 's deck'd with flowers of every hue,
Shooting their slender stems toward the sky,
Opening their golden petals to the sun,
Whose rays dry up the moistening dew that falls,
With night's dark mantle : oh, my gracious liege,
Heaven grant my vision may prophetic prove !

ATHELSTAN.

Amen, my lord ! Let all our prayers ascend
To Him who rules alike the heavens and earth,
And all that lives within them.

EDITHA, (*rising.*)

My king, my brother, and my gracious liege,
In mercy have some pity on your slave. (*Kneels.*)

ATHELSTAN (*assisting her to rise.*)

What would our beauteous sister, that she stoops
To ask of us a favour?

EDITHA.

What would I, Athelstan? Oh, I would crave,
In mercy and in pity's sake, a boon,
Which you alone can grant!

ATHELSTAN.

'Tis granted ere 'tis spoken, if it be
A boon befitting us to grant, sweet maid.

EDITHA.

Oh, help me, Heaven, in this my utmost need!

ALTHEOF.

Fear not, fair daughter; Heaven's help is nigh,
Whene'er its creatures seek its wondrous grace.

ATHELSTAN.

Dear Editha, this weakness is beneath thee.
What mighty boon is this that thou wouldst crave?

EDITHA.

A mighty boon, indeed! My liege, your sire
Was also mine; what have I done, that I
Should forfeit all that appertains to me,
From being born of an illustrious race?
And, like the daughter of a vulgar serf,
Be offer'd to the highest bidder—placed
In barter for that peace your arms should win,
Or you should cease to be.

ALTHEOF.

Daughter, too long hath blood run o'er our land,

In crimson streams; too long hath man been train'd
To slay his fellow man—enrich the earth
With precious drops of life blood. Heaven, at last,
Hath, in its boundless mercy, sent the king,
Our great and royal master, forth to rear
The palm leaf o'er this land of war and strife.

EDITHA.

That were, my lord, a great, a godlike deed,
If justice led the way; but if to heal
A nation's woes, one heart is sacrificed,
You do a certain evil, for a good
Uncertain and unreal. Thou art a priest,
Yet darest impiously to desecrate
The might of the Most High—to raise the arm,
And strike the heart that Heaven in mercy spares?

ALTHEOF.

Pardon me, daughter, if my speech is plain,
For I must urge this policy—I've laid
My whole heart bare before his grace; the king,
The nobles, and the priesthood, all combine,
To wish the realm at length may rest in peace,
And thus recruit its wasted strength: thy hand
Alone can heal the wounds so long diseased,
And bring sweet peace and concord to our isle.

EDITHA.

All, all, have leagued against me!—heaven, and earth,
And man, have all combined; and what am I,
A poor weak woman, in your powerful hands,

To do, or say, to turn your stubborn wills ;
Alas, there is no hope for me ! Come, Death !
Release me from the horrors of my fate.

SCENE II.—*Saloon in* SITHRIC's *Castle, Northumbria.*—SITHRIC, MANFRID, *and* WULFSTAN.

SITHRIC.

I tell ye, lords,
My power is fixed, in all Northumbria:
Not Athelstan nor all his armèd host
Can hurl me from the summit I have gain'd ;
Why should I yield, then, to the puny boy,
And bow me down to court his languid smile ?
Doth not my blood course through my fiery veins
With equal ardour to the sluggish stream
That animates his feeble form ? By Heaven !
I will be free as are the mountain wolves,
Or else I'll be as naught : by this good blade,
I'll carve me out a throne, whereon my race
Shall rear its crownèd head ; a diadem
Shall grace my ample brow ; Northumberland
Shall hail me as her king, and own my sway,
Or Death shall claim me with my kindred dust.

WULFSTAN.

A bold resolve ; all hail, Northumbria's king !

MANFRID.

Sithric, all hail ! All hail, my liege and king !

SITHRIC.

Prepare ye, then, for war ! Let all your serfs
Gird on their armour ; let their voices soar,

High in the heavens ; let our name resound,
O'er all our hills, and dales : nor Athelstan
Be heard again, save as our deadly foe.

(*Enter* ANLAF *and* GODFRID.)

Welcome, my sons, to this our council ! We
Have now resolved to set Northumbria free.

ANLAF.

Oh, this is glorious news ! Why should I bend
And crouch before young Athelstan ? My soul
Is fired with gen'rous ardour, and my sword
Flies from the scabbard at the glorious thought—
Northumbria shall be free !

Enter a SOLDIER.

SITHRIC.

How now, rude knave ?

SOLDIER.

My lord, ambassadors from Britain's king
Await your lordship's presence.

SITHRIC.

Ha ! what means this, friends ?
Wulfstan, attend them ! Sirrah, canst thou tell
The name these strangers bear ? [*Exit* WULFSTAN.

SOLDIER.

Two noble lords they are—Earls Kent and Essex.

SITHRIC.

Enough—you may retire. [*Exit* SOLDIER.
A gallant soldier is the noble Kent ;
No trifling matter brings the old lord here.

Enter WULFSTAN, KENT, *and* ESSEX.

KENT.

Hail, noble Sithric! hail, Northumbria's chief!

ESSEX.

Most noble Sithric, hail to thee—all hail!

SITHRIC.

Welcome, my lords—right welcome to our court!
How fares your liege, the royal Athelstan?

KENT.

In peace and comfort Athelstan doth dwell,
Surrounded by his court. His gen'rous soul
Full long hath mourn'd o'er Britain's many woes;
And to assuage her griefs, dry up her tears,
And heal the rancorous sores, that all too long
Hath fester'd in her many gaping wounds,
Hath sent the noble Essex, and myself,
With friendly greeting, to Northumbria's chief.

SITHRIC.

What would the King of Britain? speak, brave Kent,
Nor hide the shadow of one thought from us!

KENT.

Oh, noble Sithric, fitter is my hand
To wield the glittering blade, than is my tongue
To speak soft words of love, or raise a flame
Within a hero's breast, that should outvie
In glory all the honours he has won!

SITHRIC.

I pray you, noble Kent, explain your words.

KENT.

Thus saith the king to Sithric ; Britain bleeds,
The earth is moistened with the pure heart's blood
Of her most worthy sons : t' allay the strife
That all too long hath ruled o'er our fair isle,
His grace holds out to Sithric the right hand
Of godlike fellowship, proclaims him king
Of all Northumbria, subject unto none,
Save Britain's king, as suzerain and lord ;
And to cement in one eternal bond
Of love and friendship, this his gen'rous gift—
He offers noble Sithric as a bride,
The Princess Editha.

ANLAF.

Our sire already rules supreme ; why bend
The knee to Britain's king ?

SITHRIC.

Peace, Anlaf—peace ! this offer likes me well ;
I've heard the lady is most wondrous fair.

ESSEX (*aside.*)

Now are my hopes all blighted ; he will grasp,
Like menial serf, the glitt'ring bait thrown out ;
And Editha is lost,—for ever, lost !

KENT.

Fair as the morning sun, whose golden beams
Cast a bright radiance o'er the azure sky :
Bright as the verdure of Northumbria's hills,
When deck'd in summer's beauty, are the charms
Of peerless Editha : her voice is soft

And silvery as the lark's, whose matin song
Resounds o'er hill and dale; her stately form,
Is clothed in virgin modesty; her face
Beams with the roseate hue of health; her eye
Darts like a gleam of sunshine on the soul,
Illuming, with its beams of lustrous light,
All Nature's handiworks.

SITHRIC.

Now, by our hopes of joy, our soul is fired
With fierce desire; the hot blood courses through
Our sinewy frame! Good Kent, thou art possess'd
Of youthful fervour in the maiden's praise!

KENT.

All praise, heroic Sithric, doth fall short
Of her most rare deserts: a lovelier maid,
Or one endow'd with more intrinsic worth,
Ne'er gazed upon the sun.

SITHRIC.

Withdraw with me, my lords: we'll ponder well
O'er Athelstan's fair offer.

[*Exit* SITHRIC, KENT, *and* ESSEX.

ANLAF.

What think you, lords, of this soft-hearted king?
Is't fit Northumbria's chief bow down to him
And cringe, and fawn, and play the sycophant,
Or waste his hours in idle dalliance—fall
A willing victim to this treach'rous spy,
Who'll come deck'd out in smiles, clothed with deceit,

To worm herself into her victim's heart,
And learn his secret thoughts but to betray?
Shame on the man who thus would barter all
His hard-earn'd honour, pander to his lust,
And rob his sons of their inheritance
For woman's treach'rous smiles !

WULFSTAN.

Nay speak not rashly, Anlaf; this may prove
A blessing to Northumbria, and may lead
To safe and lasting peace.

MANFRID.

I would our chief had yielded to his son
This wondrous Phœnix : youthful Editha
Is far more fit to grace lord Anlaf's couch
Than rest upon the gallant Sithric's breast.

GODFRID.

Such are my thoughts, brave Manfrid ; 'tis not fit
That one so gentle should be sacrificed,
To appease the wrath of men !

ANLAF.

Our father seems delighted with the toy
Held up to bribe him, to betray his sons
By his most wily foe.

GODFRID.

Good brother, let us wait,
And hear our sire's resolve, ere we condemn him.

Enter SITHRIC, KENT, *and* ESSEX.

SITHRIC.

My lords, we have decided. Noble Kent

Will bear this answer back to Britain's king:
Our days shall end in peace, war's turmoil cease,
And even-handed justice mark our reign.
In bonds of love we'll join us to the king;
And may those bonds be lasting! May those hopes
Which Heaven, in mercy to our sinful race,
Hath planted in the breast of Athelstan,
Long live and flourish! May this favour'd isle
Recruit her wasted strength, and man once more
Repose in tranquil peace!

KENT.

Heaven grant it may be so!

SITHRIC.

My lords, you'll tarry till the morning's dawn,
Then speed you on your way. We will prepare
A fitting escort for Northumbria's queen,
Then hasten to the King of Britain's court,
To claim our beauteous bride.

ACT II.

SCENE I. — *Athelstan's Castle* — EDITHA *and* ELGIVA.

EDITHA.

Oh, woe!—oh, woe! Elgiva, the old Dane
Is all enraptured by our worthless charms. (*Weeps.*)

ELGIVA.

Alas! alas! dear lady, weep not thus.

EDITHA.

Oh, my Elgiva, would that I could rend
In twain this bleeding heart! Almighty powers!
Why was I born to be the scoff of fate—
Thrust in the world in an untoward hour,
'Mid fierce dissensions, to be offered up
A victim to the state?

ELGIVA.

Oh, 'tis a false and cruel policy,
To offer one so young and guileless up
Upon cold Mammon's altar!

EDITHA.

Alas, my Elgiva! how can I teach
My bleeding heart to bend beneath the sway
Of iron-hearted Sithric, whose stern frown
Calls forth my soul's deep terror; in whose eye
The haughty fire of proud despotic will
Blends with the frost of age, whose wrinkled brow
Speaks volumes of the fire that burns within
The soldier's rugged breast?

Enter SITHRIC, WULFSTAN, ATHELSTAN, *and* ALTHEOF.

ALTHEOF.

Daughter, we have sought thee.
Noble Dane,
Behold the peerless maid.

SITHRIC.

Oh, wondrous blaze of beauty! I am dumb
With great amaze!

ATHELSTAN.

Why weepest thou, sweet sister? Thy bright orbs
Were form'd for love and joy—no tears should dwell
In such a sweet abode.

EDITHA.

Oh, Athelstan! who is it calls them forth, (*weeps,*)
And bids them gush in torrents, till mine eyes
Are darken'd as my soul?

SITHRIC.

Nay, beauteous trembler, weep not thus: behold,
Thy slave kneels at thy feet; speak thy commands,
Nor rack my soul with torture by thy scorn.

EDITHA.

Oh, noble Sithric! if thy gentle soul
Another's woe can feel, and if thy heart
Hath not become unmindful of the pangs
That agitate and rend thy suppliant's breast,—
I pray thee fly this court—release my heart
From the uneasy thraldom forced upon it,
And, with my latest breath, I'll bless thy name!

SITHRIC.

Oh, speak not thus, thou matchless, peerless maid!
How can I teach my tongue to curb its will,
And moderate my passion? Gentle Heaven!
I thank thee for this priceless guerdon more
Than all the blessings I have else received!

EDITHA.

Thou wilt not, then, release my bleeding heart
From all the galling chains that do entwine
It in their deadly folds! Oh, Athelstan,

My brother, and my king—say, is it well
That thou shouldst desecrate the name of God,
And call this awful deed of sacrifice
An offering unto peace, and in his name
Barter a living soul—destroy the heart
That fondly trusted in thee?

ATHELSTAN.

Dear Editha, I marvel much that thou,
So ever gentle, shouldst now raise thy voice
In sweet complaining, and let grief o'erstep
The bounds of virtuous prudence. Thou hast been
Dear to my heart as are the rays of light
That gild the azure sky to human eyes;
No thought of evil ever yet hath found
A lurking place within thy breast—why fear
The sweet communion love so fondly draws
Around earth's creatures, blending into one
The souls of those who love?

EDITHA.

And darest thou thus to speak, and yet to cast
Thy sister forth from all on whom her heart
Hath placed its warm affections? Thou art false
To me and to thyself!

SITHRIC.

Oh, gentle lady, let my humble voice
Plead for thy royal brother! He has deigned
To offer to our arms thy lovely form,
Which soon shall grace Northumbria's queenly throne,
And add new lustre to the crown that binds

Thy lovely brow beneath its ample folds,
Bringing the sweets of love to heal the wounds
Of rancorous hatred, that too long hath dwelt
O'er all our sea girt isle.

EDITHA.

'Tis an ill omen'd match! The lion mates
Not with the gentle lamb; the eagle soars
High in the changing clouds, nor bows him down
To woo the humble dove! Why, then, should man
Prove false to Nature, and to Nature's laws—
Destroy the budding hopes of woman's life,
And wither all its joys beneath the frost
Of an unequal and unholy match.

SITHRIC.

Believe me, fairest of thy lovely sex,
No evil will befal thee; thou shalt reign
Supreme o'er us as o'er our subjects; peace
Shall send her soft and smiling handmaids forth
To cast her garlands 'neath thy beauteous feet;
Earth shall outvie with man to bless the hour
That gave thee to my faithful, loving arms.

EDITHA.

'Twere madness longer to attempt to plead
For mercy or for pity! If there dwells
Within thy rugged breast one gen'rous thought,
I pray you let its lustre 'light on me!

SITHRIC.

Heaven's blessings 'light on thee, thou lovely maid,
For this much of sweet grace. My future days
Will all be far too short to speak my thanks.

EDITHA.

Mere idle words flow from the well trained tongue,
As doth the gentle streamlet from its source,
While man's fierce passions rest within his breast,
As doth the pebbles 'neath the limpid stream,
Which gently courseth in its time-worn bed,
Till earth doth, in her wild convulsive throes,
Lash the late gentle current into streams
That rush and roar with maniac impetus,
And in wild torrents hurls its foaming waves
Into the mighty ocean which receives,
Within its ample bosom, tribute streams,
And bears them on in one wild rushing flood,
Destroying in their fury all the hopes
Of man, and robbing Nature of her charms—
E'en so is it with man. Let anger rise,
And rouse his fiery blood, nor love, nor joy,
Can longer find a dwelling in his breast,
But all is fierce and undissembled hate,
Where late the goddess of sweet peace reposed,
In all her tranquil charms.

SITHRIC.

Be thine the task, sweet lady, then, to curb
The fiery spirit that so long hath dwelt
Within our native isle; let thy sweet voice
Be heard amid the warriors, who so long
Have fought beneath our banners; bid them cast
Forth from their warlike hands the blood-stain'd sword,
That far too long hath drank the crimson tide

Of human life-blood, ebbing from the wounds
That man inflicts on man ; their swords will fall
In countless numbers at thy gentle feet.

EDITHA.

That were indeed a joy, the which to share
I'd freely bare my bosom to the stroke
Of Death, however questionable the guise
In which he doth appear !

ATHELSTAN.

That joy, then, be reserved for thee—thy life
Be bless'd with sweet tranquillity ; our hopes,
Sweet sister, rest alike on Heaven and thee.

EDITHA.

Oh, rash impious man, to join with Heaven
The name of erring creatures ! Grant, sweet Heaven,
That this poor heart may, as a sacrifice,
Acceptable be deem'd. Oh, may the curse
Of man's fierce passions be by this appeased !
And then, e'en though my aching heart should burst
At the fair altar where 'tis offer'd up,
It will not break in vain.

SITHRIC.

Oh, rather mayst thou live
To shed the glory of thy lustrous charms
Around the evening of our waning days !

ATHELSTAN.

And add new lustre to the princely line
From which thou art descended. Gentle Heaven,
And thou, blest Virgin, who doth rest on high,

Seated amidst the cherubim, look down
Upon this beauteous virgin, Britain's hope,—
Pour down upon her head the choicest gifts
That mortals are endow'd with; be her name,
In ages yet to come, immortalized,
As fairest and as gentlest of her sex!
Oh, may her many godlike virtues be
Enshrined in every honest Briton's heart,
While sun and moon ride in the vaulted arch
Of heaven's high and gorgeous canopy,
In their majestic course!

[*Exit* ATHELSTAN, ALTHEOF, EDITHA, *and* ELGIVA.

SITHRIC.

What think'st thou of our bride?

WULFSTAN.

Think, my lord?

SITHRIC.

Why, man, what ails thee? Thou repeat'st my words,
And yet not answer'st them.
What think'st thou of our bride?

WULFSTAN.

My lord, she is an angel, in whose form
Dame Nature hath all former works excell'd,
And cast into the shade.

SITHRIC.

Even so, good Wulfstan. Never did mine eyes
Gaze on so much fair loveliness, mine ears

E'er listen to such music, as doth fall,
In tones of sweetest melody, from lips
Too bright and glowing for a child of earth
To gaze upon, and stay the fiery blood,
That fierce desire doth cause to fill his veins
With love's impassion'd flame!

WULFSTAN.

My lord, she is a peerless paragon.
I marvel that some noble of this court
Hath not already won this priceless gem.

SITHRIC.

To thee, my Wulfstan, on whose honest faith
I may rely with safety, I will tell
The hopes and fears that struggle in my breast,
Each striving for the mastery. The maid
Hath fallen a victim to the rosy god,
Whose piercing shafts strike, with unerring aim,
The humble and the mighty. In her breast
There dwells a secret passion; every word,
Each look, each thought, reveals it; I must seek
To fathom her most secret thoughts. The slave
Who dares to think of Editha must die,
E'en though my own right hand should strike the blow.
Could I but ease me of this incubus,
And rid me of my rival, I might hope
Sweet Editha would then become more calm,
And hide her grief within her virgin breast;
Nor dim the lustre of her eyes with tears,
That silently reproach us.

WULFSTAN.

But why, my lord, seek to unroll the scroll
That fate hath placed within your ready grasp?
The maid secure, placed on Northumbria's throne,
Why need you fear a rival in her heart,
When all to whom she's known will tarry here,
And she will hence with you?

SITHRIC.

Oh, Wulfstan! thou but little know'st the arts
Of deep and damning subtlety, that lead
The Saxon through all dangers to the goal
Of his most ardent wishes. I must find
My rival in the heart of Editha,
And slake my burning thirst for vengeance, ere
The flame doth in its fury quite devour
The passion that o'ercomes me.

WULFSTAN.

My lord, I must condemn thee; for in thus
Seeking for causes which have no effect,
We trifle with Dame Fortune, who, in spleen,
Perchance may cast us off, and lend her smiles
To those who more deserve them.

(*Enter* ESSEX.)

(*Aside.*) My lord, please you retire:
I'll question him.

SITHRIC.

'Tis well, my lord. Our orders you'll attend? [*Exit.*

WULFSTAN.

How now, my lord!—what! musing?
Or are thy thoughts all soaring in the clouds?

ESSEX.

What busy fool art thou that, like a jay,
Doth freely chatter ?

WULFSTAN.

My good lord Essex, if methought those words
Were meant for Wulfstan's ear——

ESSEX.

Ha, Wulfstan ! is it thou ? My thoughts were far
From thee when thus I spoke.

WULFSTAN.

Enough, my lord ; I could not deem these words
Were meant to greet mine ear, or by this light
Thou hadst not spoke again.

ESSEX.

Tut, man—no threats !—my hand will else be found
Ready as thine to curb too free a speech.

WULFSTAN.

My lord, I were right loth to be the first
To burst the bonds of peace, so lately form'd
Between the King of Britain and my Chief,
By any private brawl.

ESSEX.

I dare be sworn, good Wulfstan, that thy hand
Would rather wield a sword than sign a bond
That seals thy boasted freedom, and enthrals
Northumbria's sons once more in Britain's toils,
E'en though that bond secured Northumbria's chief
A young and lovely bride.

WULFSTAN, (*aside.*)

By heaven and earth, 'tis he
That fain would win the maiden to his arms!
(*To* ESSEX.) In troth, Lord Essex, thou hast guess'd
my thoughts:
Northumbria will not gain much by this match,
So hastily arranged.

ESSEX.

I tell thee, Dane, this peace will end in strife,
More deadly than the fiercest war that e'er
Hath cursed this isle of ours. The untried king
Looks not in the far distance, as becomes
A prince of quick discernment: he but sees
The present; while the future all to him
Is dark and undistinguishable chaos.
Now, mark the sequel. Nature's most just laws
Forbid this cruel sacrifice; the maid,
Whose beauty dazzles Sithric, and destroys
His sober judgment, that should bid him pause,
Ere he consents to bend his noble knee
In fealty to the king, is most unmeet
To match with aged Sithric; her young heart
Is all attuned to love, and 'tis not fit
That one so young and fair, whose gentle soul,
In just abhorrence, shudders at the thought
That such an ill-starr'd union conjures up,
Should thus be sacrificed.
Rather should the wolf
Herd with the gentle fawn, the lion play
In love's soft dalliance with the timid lamb,

Than valiant Sithric cease to soar, and cast
His noble form down on the earth, to woo
The beauteous Editha.

WULFSTAN.

By Heaven, Lord Essex, there is much of truth
In thy discourse! Perchance, the peerless maid
Already hath been wooed and won! Her heart,
In all its virgin purity, would fall
An easy conquest to some daring youth,
Brave, noble, as thyself.

ESSEX.

Nay, Wulfstan, an' thou wouldst with prying eyes
Dive into her heart's secrets, I refer
You to the lovely maid. 'Twere a vain boast
To say that I possess her confidence,
And base, e'en if I did so, to betray it.

WULFSTAN.

Nay, gentle Essex, heed me not; I spoke
In words unmeasured, but methinks our views
In this unlook'd for union are alike
Strongly opposed.

ESSEX.

Thy views I know not; but I tell thee, Dane,
I'd rather that the sun no more shouldst shed
Its genial warmth around us, that the moon
Should cease to give her light, the myriad stars
For ever cease to shine, the azure sky
Become one undistinguishable mass
Of solemn darkness, than thy chieftain wed
The lovely Editha! [*Exit* ESSEX.

WULFSTAN.

'Tis even so ; his heart is most intent,
On his fair lady-love ; yet there is truth
In what his tongue hath utter'd. Sithric bends
In weak submission to the puny king,
Whose peaceful disposition well might lead
To Northumbria's independence.

SCENE II. — *A Saloon in Sithric's Castle* — ANLAF, GODFRID, *and* MANFRID.

ANLAF.

Twice hath the sun run his diurnal course ;
Twice hath the moon shed her soft mellow light
O'er all our native hills ; twice hath the earth
Resumed its wonted glories, since our sire
Advised us, by brave Manfrid, to prepare
To welcome his return—ay, and to greet,
Northumbria's youthful queen.

MANFRID.

No marvel that King Sithric hath forgot
Northumbria's barren hills, when beauty rests
Within his warlike arms ; nathless, my lord,
This youthful Hebe, that hath won his heart,
And so enthrall'd his senses, that he sleeps
In sweet forgetfulness, will so enslave
Our gallant chief in love's enticing toils,
That we shall all fall victims to the craft
Of old Turketal, who now guides the helm
Of Britain's stately barque.

GODFRID.

Manfrid, thy speech but ill becomes the tongue
That oft swore truth and fealty to our sire:
Nor will I tamely stand, and hear thy spleen
Thus vent itself in malice; the princess
Who hath become our queen, let her deserts
Be judged ere we condemn her.

ANLAF.

Brother, I know thy nature is so soft,
That beauty must be ever held by thee
In secret worship; e'en though every charm
Dame Nature hath bestow'd, bring forth a snake,
Whose venom would annihilate thy race.

GODFRID.

Anlaf,
Thou art my father's son, else would these words
Have sounded thy death-knell.

ANLAF.

Ha, sayst thou so, rash boy!—know that my sword
Has edge as keen as thine; beware, beware—
Tempt me not to chastise thee!

GODFRID, (*draws.*)

Now, by the ashes of my ancestors,
That taunt shall cost thee dear!

ANLAF, (*draws.*)

Come on, then, sir—come on!

MANFRID, (*parts them.*)

Nay, good my lords, put up your swords, weak
words

Should not destroy the bond that Nature cast
Around you at your birth.

ANLAF.

Thou'rt right, good Manfrid. Godfrid, we may need
To draw our weapons in a nobler cause.

GODFRID.

Why did you taunt me, then? you know my soul
Is fiery as thine own.

[*A flourish of trumpets heard.*

ANLAF.

Here comes our sire, and with him the fair toy
He has bartered for a crown.

Enter SITHRIC, WULFSTAN, EDITHA, ELGIVA, *and* SOLDIERS.

ANLAF.

Hail to thee, sire! and thou, fair princess, hail!

GODFRID.

Welcome, sweet princess, to our home and hearts!

SITHRIC.

Thanks, thanks, my sons, for this our welcome! broach
Choice liquors in abundance; let our halls
Resound with mirthful joy; throw open wide
Our cells and dungeons; let each heart rejoice;
Bid Sorrow cease to hold her dismal court
In all our broad domains!

EDITHA.

Brave scions of a royal house, accept
Our thanks for this reception.

GODFRID, (*aside.*)

Oh, wondrous sight!

ANLAF, (*aside.*)

Sure beauty never yet did equal this!

SITHRIC.

Come, Editha, my sweet one! Let your smiles
Illume our royal halls. Come hither, boys,
And bend thy knees in fealty to thy queen!

ANLAF, (*kneeling.*)

Most gracious queen, accept my faith and troth!

GODFRID, (*kneeling.*)

And mine, sweet lady! (*Kisses her hand.*)

EDITHA.

Rise, good my lords, I pray you; we accept
Your fealty as a token of your truth!

MANFRID, (*kneels.*)

And mine, illustrious lady—at your feet
I humbly pledge my troth!

SITHRIC.

Come, my sweet love, we will retire! Anon,
We'll meet our gallant chiefs, whose loyalty
And faith we may rely on.

[*Exit* SITHRIC, EDITHA, ELGIVA, *and* SOLDIERS.

GODFRID.

Like a sweet vision hath she passed away,
And left an endless void !

ANLAF.

'Tis said, the Serpent tempted Mother Eve
To eat forbidden fruit ; an' he had borne
A female form, in truth I should have deem'd
He had return'd again to lead the way
To our good sire's undoing !

GODFRID.

Still wilt thou harp upon that tuneless string !

ANLAF.

And so wouldst thou, good brother, wert thou next
Our father in succession !

GODFRID.

By Heaven, 'tis false ! I would not raise my voice
To cause one sigh to ruffle the fair breast
Of that angelic creature—though all earth
Hung on the single breath, or that one word
Would save the universe—if that it cast
One single ray of gloom o'er the fair face
Of beauteous Editha !

ANLAF.

Godfrid, thou art inconstant as the winds
To thy own welfare ! [*Exit* ANLAF *and* MANFRID.

GODFRID.

Hold still, thou beating heart. What can this mean?
Am I so base, so utterly depraved,
To love my father's wife. Oh, gentle Heaven !

Look down upon thy creature ; crush the fiend
That doth invade my heart, and hurl him forth,
With all the guilty thoughts he would engender
And whisper in my willing ears ! That form,
So rich in gorgeous beauty, doth outvie
And dwindle into ciphers all the rest
Of Nature's handiworks ! when shall mine eyes
E'er gaze upon these lustrous charms again ?
Oh ! 'tis a most unholy sacrifice,
To hide such wondrous charms beneath the frost
Of my good father's age : sweet Editha,
My soul doth melt in pity for the wrongs
Inflicted by the cowardice of man
On thy angelic form, which thy fair breast
In silence must endure till nature fails,
And death doth claim the spoil.

Twelve Months are supposed to elapse between the Second and Third Acts.

ACT III.

SCENE I. — *Athelstan's Castle.*

ATHELSTAN, (*solus.*)

Strange murmurs are abroad ; what dire mischance
Hath thus destroy'd our hopes of tranquil peace ?

Enter TURKETAL.

What news, Lord Chancellor ?

TURKETAL.

Oh, my dread liege !

ATHELSTAN.

Why falters thus thy tongue ?
Hath aught of evil happen'd to the state,
That turns thy cheek thus pale ?

TURKETAL.

Sithric, Northumbria's king.

ATHELSTAN.

Ha ! What of the gallant Dane ?

TURKETAL.

Death hath been busy—Sithric is no more !
Northumbria is in arms !

ATHELSTAN.

Oh, thou ill harbinger, what may this mean ?
Who heads this foul revolt ?—Dare Sithric's sons
Deny our just supremacy, and hurl
Defiance in our teeth ?

TURKETAL.

Even so, my liege.

ATHELSTAN.

Then shall chastisement follow ; they shall learn
What 'tis to trifle thus with us : our arms
Shall teach these recreant slaves what 'tis to beard
The lion in his den.

TURKETAL.

Your grace will then at once accept the gage
These traitors have thrown down ?

ATHELSTAN.

Turketal, we have striven hard for peace ;
Nay, more, we've made a living sacrifice,
And yet it doth avail not ; let our wrath
Be measured by our wrongs.

TURKETAL.

Then shall the Danes in sorrow curse the hour,
When first they did rebel.

ATHELSTAN.

Our sister must be cared for ; let brave Kent
Demand her at their hands.

TURKETAL.

My liege, I fly to execute at once
All thy commands in full. [*Exit* TURKETAL.

ATHELSTAN.

Then was our dream no idle fantasy
Of a disorder'd brain. The beauteous earth,
So lately garnish'd with all nature's sweets,
Methought was all environ'd by a cloud
Whose dark'ning shadows flung a dingy mist
O'er all earth's loveliness ; anon it rose,
And fled before the sun's illumin'd rays,
And as it faded in thin air, exposed
The barren earth, satured with human gore ;
While heaps of slaughter'd wretches fill'd the air
With noisome pestilence—their gaping wounds
Were each supplied with tongues, that cried aloud
To Heaven for vengeance ; while our rivers ran
In gushing streams of human blood, till all

Fair ocean's waves were by the crimson tide
Polluted and defiled.

(*Enter* ESSEX.)

Oh, Essex, art thou come
To cast the horrors of the coming strife
Upon our policy?

ESSEX.

My liege, it would but ill befit my tongue
To speak rank words of treason. I have heard
King Sithric is no more; his rebel sons
Have raised Rebellion's standard.

ATHELSTAN.

Beshrew me, noble Essex, but thy doubts
Have quickly come to pass.

(*Enter* KENT.)

Oh, Kent! again the blood of man must flow,
To crush unheard of treason. The fierce Danes
Have lost their new-made king; and ere the tomb
Hath closed its portals o'er his cold remains,
They've raised the standard of revolt, deny
Allegiance to their king, who placed a crown
Upon their chieftain's brow!

(*Enter a* SOLDIER.)

How now, soldier?

SOLDIER.

Lord Manfrid craves an audience with your grace
On matters of import.

ATHELSTAN.

A herald from the Danes! Bid him approach.

[*Exit* SOLDIER.

Enter MANFRID *and* TURKETAL.

MANFRID.

Great king, I am commission'd here to bear
Sad tidings to your grace.

ATHELSTAN.

My lord, we've heard, and sorrow'd at the news—
Our brother is no more.

MANFRID.

The spirit of the vet'ran king now dwells
In Anlaf's royal breast.

ATHELSTAN.

We've heard from idle rumour, thy young chief
Hath sent his heralds far and wide to bear
These tidings to his serfs.

MANFRID.

King of Britain, royal Anlaf claims
Northumbria as his birthright; her brave sons
Are Anlaf's subjects, and the slavish term
Of serf befits them not.

ATHELSTAN.

Say to lord Anlaf thus:—His honour'd sire
We placed upon Northumbria's throne; his son
Must pay a subject's homage, ere we grace
Him with the regal crown.

MANFRID.

Thus saith my liege, King Anlaf, in reply:
No homage will we pay; our princely sire
Was basely bribed his country to betray!
Peace to his manes! posterity will cast
The blame where 'tis most due.

ATHELSTAN.

Then, by our father's throne, we will repay
This treason to his cost!

MANFRID.

King Anlaf bade me say the widow'd queen
Is an incumbrance to Northumbria's court.

ATHELSTAN.

Peace, foul-mouth'd rebel! get thee from our sight!

MANFRID.

Nay, King of Britain, I but speak the words
Of Anlaf, my liege lord.

ATHELSTAN.

Bear back this answer to thy rebel chief:
Thus saith his liege and king—the die is cast;
Our hungry wolves are loosed, our swords
unsheathed—
All Britain is in arms. Ourself will lead
Our warriors to the north, there to chastise
This traitorous insolence.

MANFRID.

Come when thou wilt, doubt not we will greet thee
With a most warm reception. [*Exit.*

ATHELSTAN.

Ha! sayst thou so?—thy courage we will try,
E'en to its utmost limits. Noble lords,
Each to your duty! Kent, thy path's beset
With many dangers, yet we know thy name
Is in itself a host; the trait'rous Danes
Will scarce molest the escort that doth guard
Our sister to our court.

KENT.

My liege, I'll take with me a force shall strike
The traitors dumb with fear.

ATHELSTAN.

Turketal, on thee now devolves the care
Of our internal state: ourself will lead
Our army to chastise these rebel Danes.
Essex, thou wilt arouse the warlike bands
Of Britain's gallant sons, and at their head
Prepare to march with us to Brunsbury!

[*Exit* ATHELSTAN *and* TURKETAL.

ESSEX.

Sure never joy e'er equall'd mine—once more
My soul is free as mountain air; my brain
Whirls through my burning head; my bounding heart
Beats fiercely 'gainst my lab'ring breast! Sweet Heaven,
On bended knee, I thank thee; so much bliss
Can scarcely be endured!

SCENE II.—*Saloon in* SITHRIC'S *Castle, Northumbria.*—EDITHA *and* ELGIVA.

EDITHA.

Oh, whither shall I turn?
Within, stern Death doth hold his dismal court—
Without, wild tumult reigns. Oh woe—oh woe!
Why was I ever born? (*Weeps.*)

ELGIVA.

I pray your grace be calm; excess of grief
Is most unseemly in the sight of Heaven.

EDITHA.

What hath a wretch like me to do with Heaven?

ELGIVA.

Oh, dearest madam, speak not thus!—my heart
Is racked to see you.

EDITHA.

Why do you not, then, leave me?—all have fled
To join mine enemies! Why do you not
Worship the rising sun, and leave me here
Alone, to weep and die?

ELGIVA.

Oh, my dear mistress! now indeed I fear
That grief hath turned thy brain!

EDITHA.

Oh, would it had! sure madness would be bliss
Compared to woe like mine.

ELGIVA.

Dear madam, say not so; your griefs will find
Relief you little dream of.

EDITHA.

Oh, Elgiva! thou fain wouldst bid me hope,
When hope is all in vain. Sure Heaven hath pour'd
Its phial of wrath upon our sinful head.

ELGIVA.

See you no ray of light amid the gloom
Of the dark horizon? Mine eyes are free
And more inured to darkness; I discern
A far off ray of dazzling hue. Behold,
The clouds are quickly passing from my view,
And all is bright and glowing! Now the sun
Bursts forth in fiery flames, its genial warmth
Dries up the hazy atmosphere—the sky,
Which, lately louring, gloomed so terrific,
Is now one field of azure blue! All earth
Teems with its luscious fruits; you wander forth
In ecstasy to gaze upon the scene.

EDITHA.

Oh, thou false prophetess!

ELGIVA.

Not so, my queen.

EDITHA.

Oh, why hast thou again, at one fell swoop,
Crush'd every ray of hope.

ELGIVA.

Dear madam, hear me. In the dismal clouds,

Which rose before my vision, I beheld
The royal Sithric, who is now no more;
And as he passed away, the ray of light
That beamed in the far distance, and at length
Banished the darkness from the clearing sky,
Assumed a human form, and as it came
Nearer and nearer to mine eager gaze,
I recognised lord Essex, in whose eyes——

EDITHA.

Oh, Heavens!

ELGIVA.

There beam'd a true and soul-entrancing flame,
Which dried the fount of sorrow at thy heart,
And gladdened it with joy—which made the earth
And heavens appear to thy enraptured gaze
More beautiful, than ere his noble heart,
Rich in the fervour of his virtuous love,
Had been severely tried!

EDITHA.

Oh, thou deceitful minister of joy—
Too great to be endured!

(*Enter* GODFRID.)

What means this rude intrusion? Must our grief
And sorrows thus be gazed upon by eyes
Which Nature's laws, at least, should fill with tears
As sacred as our own?

GODFRID.

Lady, my steps were hither bent to seek,
In solitude, some solace to the woe
That rankles in my breast, and not to break

Upon thy silent sorrows. I knew not
You were in this apartment, or my feet
Should not have enter'd here.

EDITHA.

Oh, Godfrid, thou wert ever gentle—kind,
To us and to thy sire. Alas, not so
Was thy stern brother, Anlaf! yet we hear
You aid him now in treason to his king;
And ere thy father rests within his tomb
You cast obloquy on his honour'd name,
And call down Heaven's vengeance on the land
That thus impiously is desecrated
By thy stern brother's pride, and raise a storm
Of warring passions in the breast of man,
Which, ere it shall subside, will cause to flow
Man's blood in crimson streams.

GODFRID.

'Tis in thy power, sweet lady, to revoke
My sinful promise, if there be a sin
In such a promise made.

EDITHA.

Thy words bring comfort to my heart, good youth.
How can I aid thee in a cause so just,
And thus arrest the horrors that appear
Impending o'er our heads?

GODFRID.

My brother without aid from me would fail,
Nor dare to cope alone with Britain's king.
This he well knows, and to ensure my aid,

With all the host of friends who wait my nod,
Hath purchased my good will by offering me
A fair partition of Northumbria's lands,
With honours that shall place me on a throne
More lasting than his own.

EDITHA.

And wilt thou now withdraw thee, and renounce
This treasonable intent?

GODFRID.

This will I do—nay, more; I will submit,
And bend the knee to kingly Athelstan;
Become a faithful subject to his grace,
And calm Northumbria down again to peace;
Make Anlaf bend his stubborn will, and peace
Restore to all the land.

EDITHA.

And canst thou do all this?

GODFRID.

I can, and will; but must have meet reward
For such a sacrifice.

EDITHA.

Trust me, thou shalt! Our brother will not fail
To recompense thy deeds.

GODFRID.

Nay, 'tis to thee, dear lady, I must look
For my great recompence.

EDITHA.

Alas, good youth! it is not in our power
E'er to reward thee, save with countless thanks.

GODFRID.

Dear lady, you much wrong yourself, to doubt
The potency of thy most wondrous charms!

EDITHA.

What mean you, good my lord? It is not meet
Such words should greet our ears.

GODFRID.

Oh, say not so, sweet Editha! My heart
Bows down in silent worship to the charms
Of thy angelic beauty. Thy sweet voice
Falls on mine ear in magic tones, that fill
My soul with all the fierceness of desire,
To claim thee as mine own.

EDITHA.

What! darest thou thus to desecrate alike
The laws of God and man—to cast thine eye
With foul unnatural longings on the form
Of thy dead father's wife, ere yet the tomb
Hath closed its portals o'er his cold remains?
Darest thou do this, yet live?

GODFRID.

Nay, sweet one, judge not rashly! My good sire,
Absorb'd in his own selfishness, forgot
That Nature would revolt, if her just laws
By him were all revoked.

EDITHA.

Oh, shameful! Most unnatural are thy thoughts—

Surpassing in their turpitude all else
That ever yet we heard.

GODFRID.

Nay, thou art over sensitive, sweet love !—
You wrong yourself and me.

EDITHA.

Oh, thou incestuous beast ! Unnatural son,
Whose thoughts degrade the godlike form of man,
I marvel that thou fearest not to speak
Thy dreadful thoughts aloud ! Is there no God,
Whose ear is ever open, and whose eye
Doth read thy sinful thoughts—whose anger roused,
Would crush thee in thy guilt? Ye Heavenly Powers !
In mercy look upon this sinful wretch,
And turn his guilty thoughts !

[EDITHA *attempts to retire, when* GODFRID *seizes her dress, and flings himself at her feet.*

GODFRID.

Oh, leave me not in anger, gentle queen—
Hope of my heart, and idol of my soul !
Turn not thine eyes away ; let not thine heart
Condemn my ardent nature ! I have striven
And struggled 'gainst this soul-devouring flame,
Which, in its fiery course, consumeth all
The gentler passions of my tortured breast,
Since first the hour you came across my path,
Like to a beam of heavenly light, to cheer
This dreary world, as doth the morning's sun

Illume the vaulted arch of yon bright sky,
And chase away the sombre hue of night;
And yet it hath avail'd not.

EDITHA.

Oh, rather would I die,
Than listen to thy suit, or lend my soul
To such unrighteous thoughts! Come, Elgiva,
We will retire, and on our bended knees,
Implore Heaven's mercy for this lustful wretch,
Whose guilt is far too great for man to bear!
Farewell, unhappy man!

GODFRID.

Thou shalt not leave me thus, though earth and hell
Conspire to my undoing.

EDITHA.

Not leave thee? Sir, unhand me! We have heard
Thy lips already utter that should make
Earth tremble 'neath thy footsteps. Off, sir!—off!

GODFRID.

By hell! thou shalt not go
Till thou hast listened to my ardent prayer,
E'en though you slay me with your bitter scorn.

ELGIVA.

Unhand the queen, or our loud cries shall raise
The castle to her rescue!

Enter ANLAF *and* MANFRID.

ANLAF.

What! is our gentle mother casting lures,

To catch thee in her meshes? Sweet, methinks,
Our royal father's memory might hold
A place within thy breast, till death's cold sweat
Had ceased to rest upon his cold remains.

EDITHA.

Anlaf, for once we welcome thy approach
With tears of heartfelt joy.

ANLAF.

Nay, madam, trouble not thyself to frame
Soft words to greet our ears! We heed them not.

EDITHA.

Thy heart, we know, is like an uncut flint,
Which needs must be oft struck, ere it emit
One single spark of fire; and yet thy words
Are far more pleasing to our ears than those
Thy brother spoke but now.

[*Exit* EDITHA *and* ELGIVA.

ANLAF.

What means all this? hast thou and the fair dame
Been bandying loving words? Thy very looks
Betray the inward workings of a mind
But ill at ease.

GODFRID.

Let it not trouble you—I heed her not.

ANLAF.

Nay, an' thou dost, small import wert to me,
For ere to-morrow's sun sinks in the west,
She quits Northumbria's halls.

GODFRID.

So soon ?

ANLAF.

Ay, Godfrid ; and methinks 'twere none too soon,
If we would save thee from her treach'rous wiles.

GODFRID.

You wrong her, Anlaf—grossly, foully wrong her ;
I marvel that you speak thus wantonly
Of her our father loved.

ANLAF.

Brother, I hate her ; from the very hour
Our father sold my birthright, I did loathe
This prototype of Eve !

GODFRID.

Unmanly and unjust, to cast the blame
Upon the fair Editha ; let it rest
Upon her brother's head——

ANLAF.

Enough of this ! How look'd the king (*to* MANFRID)
As you declared our purpose ?

MANFRID.

More like a hero than we yet have deem'd him.

ANLAF.

Well, let him come, we'll greet him and his force
With a most warm reception, and thus show
The spirit of our warlike sire yet dwells
In Northumbria's gallant sons.

(*Enter* OSCAR *and* GLENDIG.)

Welcome, brave princes, to our father's halls !

Right gladly do we welcome such brave friends
To this our humble court.

GLENDIG.

Happy the king, who, like thy royal sire,
Doth leave a son, like thee, brave prince, to wear
The crown he hath bequeathed thee !

ANLAF.

Say, gallant princes, is it meet, that we
Should forfeit our just rights, and humbly bend
Our knee in fealty to fair Britain's king,
For that which is our birthright ?

OSCAR.

No, by the good Saint David ! Royal prince,
I would not yield to Athelstan one jot,
But claim at once thy crown, as doth become
The son of thy brave sire.

ANLAF.

Already have we flung in Britain's teeth
The gauntlet of defiance ; armèd hosts
Are marching hither, headed by the king ;
And his resolve is now to crush our power,
Ere 'tis concentrated.

OSCAR.

What power have you to stay him on his march,
Or meet him in the field ?

ANLAF.

Five hundred men-at-arms
Already are in motion ; on our hills
The beacon fires will cast a lurid glare,

Whose bright reflection will at once arouse
Some fifteen hundred more, who do await,
With most impatient zeal, to hear the cry,
" Northumbrians, to arms !" which shall resound,
And send its echoes far and wide, to bear
The welcome news the moment they approach
The town of Brunsbury.

GLENDIG.

'Tis well, brave Anlaf; we ourselves can bring
Five hundred well-tried warriors to the field,
Fully equipp'd for action, and whose breasts
Are panting for the fray.

ANLAF.

Thanks, gallant princes ; victory is sure,
With such a noble host ; we'll seek the foe,
And give him instant battle, should he dare
To meet us in the field.

ACT IV.

SCENE I. — *Field in Northumberland.*

(*Flourish of Trumpets.*)

Enter ATHELSTAN, ESSEX, SOLDIERS, &c.

ATHELSTAN.

Here halt we for the night ! Good Essex, see
Our tent securely guarded. Let our spies
Proceed to gain intelligence. Ourself

Will now retire awhile ; let our brave hosts
Seek that repose they need.

[*Exit* ATHELSTAN, SOLDIERS, *&c.*

ESSEX.

Oh, thou dread Spirit, whose all-seeing eye
Doth gaze upon this scene, in mercy, spare
The royal Athelstan ! let no rash hand
Deprive our king of life—that precious gift
Which thou alone bestow'st ! Oh, guard his life
In the forthcoming strife ; let victory fall
Upon our warlike arms, and save this land
From years of deadly fray.

(*Enter* CEDRIC.)

How now, good Cedric ?
What welcome news hast thou wherewith to greet
My ears, that thus you leave the bivouac fire,
To wander forth alone ?

CEDRIC.

My lord, there is a harper who hath gained
Access into our camp ; our gallant troops
With joy are all elated, as his voice
In tones of deepest pathos doth awake
The merry roundelay.

ESSEX.

Some villain spy, who, in a minstrel's garb,
Hath entered thus our camp. Cedric, thine eye
Is like the eagle's, and thy courage tried ;
Watch thou this minstrel well—ay, and detain him,
Should he attempt to leave the camp ere I
Have probed his purpose well.

CEDRIC.

My lord, an' he doth leave the camp, he'll march
O'er my dead body first.

ESSEX.

I know thee, gallant soldier, well, nor fear
To trust him to thy care.

CEDRIC.

Thanks, noble lord. May Heaven's curse light on me,
When I betray my trust ! [*Exit* CEDRIC.

ESSEX.

Once more I live and breathe—
Once more the warm blood courseth through my veins
With wild impetus. Oh, thou lovely queen,
Arbiter of my destiny, what joys
Are yet in store for Essex ! Heaven itself
Hath dealt this stroke of justice, to restore
The beauteous Editha to roseate health,
And animate once more with life and joy
My long oppressed breast. [*Exit.*

SCENE II.—*Another part of the Field*—ANLAF, *as a Minstrel, and Soldiers carousing.*

FIRST SOLDIER.

Come, pledge us, minstrel, in the wassail bowl !

SECOND SOLDIER.

Nor fear to drain it to the lowest peg.

ANLAF.

Brave soldiers, here's your health ; may victory
Rest on your arms,——or mine ! (*Aside.—Drinks.*)

Enter ESSEX.

How now, sir knave ! what dost thou in our camp ?

ANLAF.

Most worthy sir, I come to pass an hour
Around the bivouac fire, and cheer my heart,
By gazing on these warriors' burnish'd arms,
Which, to my mind, recals back days of yore,
When in my early youth I joyful troll'd
The merry roundelay.

ESSEX.

An' thou art skill'd in minstrelsy, I'll find
A king to listen to thee.

ANLAF.

Thanks, noble sir ; I'm late from Scotia's court,
Where oft I've troll'd my lay to Constantine,
And ta'en a princely guerdon from the hands
Of Scotia's lovely queen !

ESSEX.

Sayst thou so ?—follow me !

[*Exit* ESSEX *and* ANLAF.

FIRST SOLDIER.

Good comrades, this is scarcely fair, to take
Our boon companion from us.

SECOND SOLDIER.

Nay, heard you not the words Lord Essex spoke ?

Perchance he'll lead the minstrel to the king,
And give him a rich guerdon.

CEDRIC, (*aside.*)

I know him well, and I will watch him, too;
For there is mischief lurking in his eye,
That bodes the king no good. I've served his sire,
And cannot now betray the son, yet stay
The purport of his visit to our camp.

SCENE III. — *Interior of Athelstan's Tent.*

ATHELSTAN, (*solus.*)

Where stays Lord Essex?—I have need of him
To cheer my drooping spirits; dismal thoughts
Of man's deep treachery assail my soul,
And palsy it with fear;—
——Off, off, vile incubus,
And haunt the guilty! wherefore should I fear,
Who long to live in peace with all mankind?

(*Enter* ESSEX *and* ANLAF.)

Welcome, my lord; in troth we were well tired
Of our own solemn thoughts.

ESSEX.

My liege, I bring you one will cheer your heart
With music's magic notes, and please your ear
With tales of troubadours.

ATHELSTAN.

Right welcome is the minstrel to our camp,
If treason lurk not 'neath his minstrel's garb!

ESSEX.

An' I but saw the slightest treachery
In word or deed, his body soon should swing
From yon majestic oak, whose giant limbs
Would scarcely bend beneath a traitor's form,
However bold the front he did assume
To hide his foul intent.

ANLAF.

I sought not, lord, to enter this fair tent—
Then why insult me with thy doubts and threats?

ATHELSTAN.

To caution thee, and save thee from the fate
That surely would await thee, did we doubt
Thy truth or loyalty.

ANLAF.

You know me not, most gracious sire, or else
You would not *thus mistrust* me.

[*A flourish of trumpets is heard.*

ATHELSTAN.

What means that, Essex?

(*Enter* KENT.)

Ha, my noble Kent!
We did not look to see thee, till the morn.

KENT.

My liege, I tarried not; when danger presses,
It boots not to waste time. Whom have we here?

ESSEX.

One whom we now may well dispense with—
Sir minstrel, follow me!

ATHELSTAN.

Hold, gentle minstrel! though thy harp's unstrung,
We owe thee guerdon; ours, not thine, the blame,
We listened not unto thee.

ANLAF.

Pardon me, gracious sire, I may not take
The wage I have not won.

ATHELSTAN.

Then take this as our gift, not as thy wage.

ANLAF, (*aside.*)

I dare not now refuse his gold;
May curses light upon the hand that gives it!
[*Takes the gold, and exit with* ESSEX.

ATHELSTAN.

How parted the rude Danes with their fair queen?

KENT.

My liege, 'tis well I tarried not, or else
Her grace had suffer'd more; even as it is
Her wrongs demand redress.

ATHELSTAN.

How, Kent? The rebels dared not add insult
To other grievous wrongs.

KENT.

My liege, I hear the rebel chief himself
Hath ever treated the fair queen with scorn
And most unmanly cruelty; but this
Her grace could well endure, and murmur not,
For love she courted not from him; not so

Was youthful Godfrid ; in his breast there burn'd
A foul and most unnatural flame. He loved
The fair and gentle partner of his sire
With most unhallow'd lust, and ever gazed
On her transcendent charms with flaming eyes
Of wild and fierce desire : ere I arrived,
He dared to breathe into her wondering ears
Soft words of lustful love, and to enforce
The horror-stricken queen, despite her wrath
And most indignant scorn, to hear the vows
Of foul, unnatural, and incestuous love,
In quick succession 'scape his treach'rous lips.
Her grace, being almost frenzied by her fears,
Could scarcely move or breathe, when Anlaf came,
And in derision banter'd the fair queen
Upon vile Godfrid's love, denounced herself
As full of treach'rous wiles.

ATHELSTAN.

How heard you this, good Kent ?

KENT.

E'en from the queen's own lips, and all borne out
By her attendant, too.

ATHELSTAN.

Oh, thou all-seeing God, who know'st each thought
By which thy erring creatures are misled—
Oh, give me but to chastise these foul slaves
As merits their misdeeds, then will I yield
My soul without a murmur, e'en though life
Were far more precious to my weary frame

Than ever yet it hath indeed appear'd !
Oh, Kent, my soul is sicken'd ; for 'twas I
Who plunged Editha into such a den
Of fearful villany.

KENT.

Think not of it, your grace ; let vengeance fall
Upon their guilty heads. Here do I swear,—
So help me Heaven, in my utmost need,—
Not one of that accursed race shall rest,
While I have strength to wield a sword, or voice
To lead my followers on ! The slaves shall die,
Or I will cease to live !

ATHELSTAN.

Oh, thou brave warrior, with thee will I join
With all the energy such injuries raise
In my enraged breast.

(*Enter* ESSEX.)

So quick return'd—I trust you have not left
The minstrel unattended in our camp ?

ESSEX.

Not so, your grace ; I've placed upon his trail
A gallant soldier, who will mark him well,
And guard his king from treachery, while life
Doth animate his form.

KENT.

I know not why, but in my breast there lurks
A doubt of that same minstrel. I have seen
Those piercing eyes before, yet cannot call
His features to my memory. I fear
There's treason in his eye.

ATHELSTAN.

No more of him, my lord; he's in safe hands,
Or Essex would not leave him.

ESSEX.

Believe me, gallant Kent, the knave is watch'd,
And yet he knows it not. Should treach'ry lurk
Within his breast, his life will answer it.

(*Enter* CEDRIC.)

Ha, Cedric, has the minstrel left our camp,
That thus we see you here?

CEDRIC.

He has, my lord; and ere he went, he flung
This well-fill'd purse with contumely away,
And cursed the hand that gave it.

ATHELSTAN.

And thou, brave soldier, what didst thou, when thus
The minstrel proved a spy?

CEDRIC.

E'en pick'd it up, and dogg'd him, step by step,
Until I saw him fairly leave the camp.

KENT.

Then art thou a base poltroon, or thy sword
Had pierced the traitor's heart.

CEDRIC.

My lord, I am soldier.

ATHELSTAN.

A soldier! Dar'st thou boast the glorious name,
Yet let a spy escape? Thou—thou art unfit
To bear the warlike name!

CEDRIC.

My liege, I am a soldier, and can do
A soldier's duty. In the battle-field
My arm is ever ready to defend
My country and my king.

ATHELSTAN.

Vain boaster! why didst let the spy escape,
But that thy coward soul fear'd to detain him?

CEDRIC.

My liege, you wrong me. I came here to speak
Words of deep import, and I trust your grace
Will hear, ere you condemn me.

ESSEX.

I pray your grace to hear him; he is brave
And fearless as the lion when he springs
Upon his deadly foe.

ATHELSTAN.

Speak on, then, soldier; and we trust thy words
Will clear the doubts that in our breast hath sprung
To thy dishonour.

CEDRIC.

My liege, I trust to prove, in a few words,
My truth and loyalty. Lord Essex gave
Into my watchful care one whom I knew;
And knowing, marvell'd much to see him here,
Where dangers did surround him. He came forth
With noble Essex from your grace's tent,
And as I follow'd in his track, he flung

This purse away, and curses fearful fell
From out his trait'rous lips.

ATHELSTAN.

And you heard this, yet let the knave escape?

ESSEX.

Cedric, thou art a traitor to thy king,
And false to me, thy lord!

CEDRIC.

Not so, my lord; born in Northumberland,
I took the oath of fealty to the Dane,
Who ruled with iron hand my fatherland.
I served stern Sithric many a weary year,
And for reward met contumely; his arm
At length was raised to strike me, when my sword
Received the well-aimed blow; he fell, I fled;
Since then I've served your lordship. If my arm
Was ever wanting in a valiant cause,
I pray you now condemn me.

ESSEX.

It were, indeed, ingratitude in me
To speak against thy valour; twice thine arm
Hath saved my life; twice hath thy goodly sword
Been steeped in foemen's blood; twice hath mine eye
Beheld thee foremost in the battle fray,
Dealing death around thee; thou art brave,
And hitherto thou hast been trusty,—yet—
Thou hast been wanting now.

CEDRIC.

An' I had not been bound by honour's ties,
The traitor had not thus escaped ; but he
Who once swore fealty to the sire, could not,
Without dishonour to his name, betray
The son unto his foes.

ATHELSTAN.

Ha ! what means the knave ? Speak, soldier : say
Who was the minstrel spy ?

CEDRIC.

Lord Anlaf, son of Sithric, and now chief
Of proud Northumbria.

ATHELSTAN.

Soldier, thou art a traitor, and thy life
Shall answer for this treason.

CEDRIC.

I am no traitor ! I
Am true and faithful. Could your grace e'er trust
A man who thus betray'd unto his foes
The son of one to whom he'd bent the knee
And sworn a subject's fealty ? Could I thus
Descend to play the trait'rous knave, such deeds
Would stamp my name with infamy. Your grace
Condemns me now, and then you could not trust
me.

ATHELSTAN.

My lords, he reasons well ; our tent's unsafe,
E'en though well guarded by our gallant troops,
Some loophole might remain, wherein could creep
This traitor to our tent.

ESSEX.

It were most unwise
To risk your precious life; my humble tent
Is well surrounded. By your grace's leave,
I will surrender it, and take a share
Of noble Kent's to-night.
You may retire. [*To* CEDRIC.]

[*Exit* CEDRIC.

A flourish of trumpets.

Enter ALTHEOF.

ATHELSTAN.

Welcome, lord bishop, to our camp; thy voice
Will rouse our soldiers' fervent zeal; thy arm
Deal death unto our foes.

ALTHEOF.

Oh, sire, it grieves my soul that all our hopes
Of sweet and lasting peace should fade away,
And sink into nonenity. The slaves
Of wild, ungovern'd passions, who have cast
The fiery brand of discord o'er this isle,
So lately teeming with its fragrant sweets,
Which rose like incense in the morning air,
Must now be crush'd at once, their pride cast down,
No more to rise again o'er this fair land,
To cast their baleful influence—destroy
The handiworks of God.

ATHELSTAN.

E'en so, lord bishop; we will meet the knaves
Soon as the sun doth gild the distant hills,

And hunt them till the shades of evening hide
Them 'neath her sombre veil.

ALTHEOF.

Soon as the early blush of morn appears,
Let all our warriors meet, let prayers ascend.
Myself will offer up high mass, and crave
The blessings of Almighty on our arms!

KENT.

Where rest you, holy father, while the hours
Of night do pass away?

ALTHEOF.

Beneath heaven's canopy; the cool night air
Will best recruit my strength.

ATHELSTAN.

Not so, good father. We ourselves do purpose
To seek Lord Essex's tent;—will you not with us?

ALTHEOF.

No; by your grace's leave, I fain would spend
Some of the silent hours of night alone,
To offer up my prayers to the Most High,
Whose ear is ever open, and whose eye
Nought evil can escape! If this fair tent
Is vacant, I will tenant it till morn.

ATHELSTAN.

E'en as you will. Let careful watch be kept
Around its every entrance! We have had
Lord Anlaf in a minstrel's garb within,
And doubt not but the traitor still may lurk
Near unto our camp.

ALTHEOF.

Fear not for me, your grace; the all-seeing eye
Looks down upon His creatures; His dread voice
Is heard amid the murmuring of the wind,
Which sweeps o'er all sweet Nature as she rests
In this most solemn hour!

ATHELSTAN.

Unto His guidance, then, we now will leave you,
And seek some slight repose.

KENT.

Let me beseech you, have a care! Let guards
Be placed around this tent.

ALTHEOF.

I thank you, noble Kent, for so much caution!
It shall not be in vain.

ATHELSTAN.

Heaven have you in its keeping!

[*Exit* ATHELSTAN, KENT, *and* ESSEX.

ALTHEOF.

It were unwise not to take caution, thus
Urgently offered. [*Exit and re-enter.*
Oh, thou all-potent Power, whose august voice
Is heard amid the howling of the blast,
In whose right hand the thunderbolts of heaven
Are poised, whose eye pervadeth earth and sky—
Oh, grant, in mercy, Athelstan may live
To crush rebellion, and restore once more
Sweet peace to this fair isle! (*Sits down.*)
I know not why, but dismal shadows flit

Across my mental vision. Can it be
That Heaven thus vouchsafes to his worshipper
A foretaste of the dangers that assail
His king and country? Could my blood be shed
And offered up t'appease the wrath of man,
And calm those wild, ungovernable Danes,
Restore sweet peace to Albion's lovely shore,
How freely would I yield my life to save
This land from all the horrors that assail
Her in the coming strife!

(*Attempts to sleep, then speaks.*)

My blood creeps slowly through my sluggish veins,
And yet I cannot sleep; I feel a chill
Fall on my beating heart, my eyelids droop,
My limbs seem paralysed; what may this mean,
That thus I am enfeebled—while my pulse
Beats wildly as it would escape the bounds
That Nature hath allotted it?—I'll wrap
Yon cloak around me, and its ample folds
May tempt the drowsy god; thus may I gain
An hour or two's sweet sleep.

(*Rises and takes the king's cloak, which he puts on, and again sits down, and sleeps.*)

Enter ANLAF.

ANLAF.

So, Anlaf, so,
The tent is gained; what more remains to do
Must now be done, and yet I dread to strike
The blow that places on my ample brow

A kingly diadem: curse on this coward fear!
Why should I gaze upon that fragile form
Which lies before me thus in tranquil sleep,
And hesitate to strike the fatal blow
That makes that sleep eternal? He will pass
From life to death without a single pang
That Nature doth inflict! This keen-edged blade
Will at one blow dissever all the ties
That bind him to the earth.

(*Approaches behind him.*)

How calm he sleeps!
Not e'en a muscle of his form doth rise
To bid me pause, and yet I would he moved,
Wer 't but to prove he lives, and that I struck
A living man, and not a lifeless clod.

(ALTHEOF *throws out his legs.*)

Ay, now in sooth the deed must be perform'd,
Or else he will arouse, and his shrill voice
Will summon to his aid the guards who wait
Around the entrance of this gaudy tent.

(*Creeps slowly up behind* ALTHEOF, *and stabs him.*)

This to thy heart, false king!

ALTHEOF, (*attempting to rise.*)

So soon—
And is my dream then real? Oh, help, there—help!

ANLAF.

'Tis mercy now to end him, and my life
Depends upon his death! (*Stabs him again.*)

ALTHEOF.

Help—oh, help! 'Tis past; my eyes grow dim.
Death! thou art fearful in thy bleeding form.
Now all is dark and hueless; gentle Heaven,
Receive my soul! and oh, forgive this wretch—
He knows not what he does! O——h! (*Dies.*)

ANLAF, (*uncovering* ALTHEOF.)

Hell, and ten thousand furies! Have I steep'd
My hands in human blood—defaced the form
Of God's own image! and yet not appeased
The fiery wrath that urged me on to slay
The king, my bitter foe? Whom have we here?
That face! those vestments, too! the sacred cross,
All, all denote the truth! What have I done?
Destroyed the servant of the church? Defiled
My hands with priestly blood! Oh, woe! oh, woe!
My very soul doth sicken at the deed
My guilty hand hath done! [*Exit.*

Enter GUARDS.

FIRST GUARD.

I tell thee, Aldred, that I heard men speak
In tones of horror. Ho! behold our lord
Is basely murdered! Raise the alarm, quick—quick!
The murd'rer is yet here—the blood yet flows!
Oh, horror, horror, horror! [*Exit* GUARDS.
Just Heaven!
Who can have done this deed? (*Weeps.*)

Enter ATHELSTAN, KENT, ESSEX, *and* GUARDS.

ATHELSTAN.

Merciful Heaven!

KENT.

Let careful search be made; each avenue
That leads toward this tent be guarded well:
And, on your lives, let not the wretch escape
Who thus hath murdered God's anointed son!

ESSEX.

Alas, alas! my liege, sure Heaven itself
Did prompt your grace to quit this tent last night!

ATHELSTAN.

Heaven's will be done! the blow was doubtless meant
To rive our royal breast; would that our words
Had made more impress on our murdered friend!
But grief avails not now; let ev'ry breast
Be steeled 'gainst pity in the coming strife!
They who send forth assassins thus to steal
Upon us in our tent, and basely slay
Their monarch in his sleep, deserves the fate
Heaven and our arms award them!

ACT V.

SCENE I.—*Anlaf's Camp. Exterior of Anlaf's Tent.*

GODFRID, MANFRID, WULFSTAN, GLENDIG, OSCAR.

GODFRID.

Behold, my lords, along the eastern sky
The first soft blush of morn appears, and yet
Our royal brother comes not!

MANFRID.

Patience, my lords! beshrew me 'tis unwise
To blame our gallant chief; some unknown cause
Detains him 'gainst his will.

OSCAR.

Once more, I tell thee, Danes, that I like not
This absence of your chief: it is not meet
That we, whose blood runs clear in our pure veins
As are the crystal streams which gurgling rise
Amid our verdant valleys—as the snow
Which lies in fleecy flakes on our bleak hills,
Whose mountain ridges rise in tow'ring forms
Toward the azure sky—should thus attend
In idle dalliance on your loitering chief,
Who, in defiance of our counsel, plays
The base, ignoble character of spy,
And by his most untimely absence risks
All our hard-earned honour.

WULFSTAN.

Princes, I do beseech you, ponder well
Ere thus you cast discredit on our chief,
Whose mighty soul would shrink in dumb amaze
To hear his honour doubted!

GLENDIG.

Wherefore tarries he?

WULFSTAN.

Alas, my lord! I know not. Heaven forbid
Aught evil has befall'n him!

GLENDIG.

Your fears but add more weight to our wise counsel
Which your proud chief did spurn.

GODFRID.

Enough of this!—Behold! the god of day
Already sheds his golden beams around
Earth's circling orbit. Let our troops prepare
To meet King Athelstan: ourself will lead
Them in our brother's absence.

OSCAR.

Now, by the ashes of my sire, I swear,
No sword of mine shall draw for Anlaf's cause
Till Anlaf doth appear!

GLENDIG.

Nor shall a man, o'er whom my voice holds sway,
Move in the prince's absence.

GODFRID.

Brave princes, pause!—you would not stain the name
Bequeathed by thy brave ancestors—thy word
Is pledged to aid our cause!

OSCAR.

Beware, young sir, how you provoke our wrath!

GODFRID.

Ha, sayst thou! (*Draws;* OSCAR *draws.*)

WULFSTAN.

Forbear, my lords; I charge ye both, forbear!

MANFRID.

Lord Godfrid, thou art in the wrong: thy words
Are quicker than thy thoughts.

GODFRID.

Oscar, thine hand—pardon my free speech,
My blood boils o'er with ire.

Enter ANLAF.

ANLAF.

I crave your pardon, friends; are ye prepared
To give these foemen battle?

OSCAR.

Why should you doubt us? We have pledged our troth,
Which never yet was falsified; our troops
Are ready arm'd, and wait but for the word
To charge, ere they have at them.

ANLAF.

Why, that is well!

GLENDIG.

Cold is thy greeting, Anlaf, and thine eye
Rolls with uneasy motion o'er the camp,
As though some trait'rous caitiff had been caught
Within its canvass'd walls.

ANLAF.

How!—wouldst thou taunt me?

(*Looks on his bloody hands.*)

(*Aside*)—'Tis true, my hands are dyed with blood, and yet
It is not stamp'd upon my burning brow.

OSCAR, (*aside to* GLENDIG.)

By Heaven, he is a craven! in his eye
The demon Fear doth lurk.

GLENDIG.

High in the heavens, already Sol doth ride,
Illuming with his beams the clear blue sky,
Whose radiant lustre casts into the shade
The solemn darkness of the early morn ;
And yet our troops rest on their arms ; the foe
Will deem us cowards all !

MANFRID, (*aside to* ANLAF.)

My lord, thou'rt wounded, and thy hands are dyed
With crimson stains of blood.

ANLAF, (*aside to* MANFRID.)

'Tis false !—I charge you, name it not again.
I did not do the deed.

OSCAR, (*aside to* GLENDIG.)

Now, by the good Saint David, do I deem
The prince hath played a deep and desperate game !
His hands are dyed with blood ; his haggard cheek
Proclaims a mind but ill at ease. Beshrew me,
But much I fear me he hath steeped his soul
In the blood of Britain's king !

GLENDIG, (*aside to* OSCAR.)

What ! think you Anlaf doth possess the heart
Or hand of an assassin ?

OSCAR, (*aside.*)

Even so, good Glendig.

GLENDIG, (*aside.*)

Then would I not degrade myself to join
The base and treacherous knave !

OSCAR, (*to* GLENDIG.)

Hush! Anlaf now doth speak.

ANLAF.

Be this the order of our field: myself
Will lead the centre; in the van, brave Oscar,
You and good Wulfstan will your warriors lead;
Glendig and Godfrid will bring up the rear;
While trusty Manfrid the reserve commands,
To aid where'er 'tis needed.

GODFRID.

Why should I loiter in the rear, good brother?
The van should be my post.

ANLAF.

Nay, gentle Godfrid, let us not now waste
Our time in needless words!

GLENDIG.

Already have we wasted precious time,
While danger doth surround us; deeds, not words,
Have terrors for our foes.

ANLAF.

Away, then, gallant friends, each to the post
Of honour that's assigned him!

[*Exit, all but* ANLAF.

I would I had not steeped my soul in blood,
Or slain that holy man!

SCENE II.—*Another part of the Field.*

Enter ESSEX *and* GODFRID. (SOLDIERS, *fighting, cross the stage.*)

ESSEX.

Stand, villain Dane! I charge thee, stand! or die
The death of a vile traitor.

GODFRID.

Fool! art thou then already tired of life,
That thus thou rashly plung'st into the stream
Of Lethe's stagnant water? Back, sir—back,
I seek a nobler quarry!

ESSEX.

Perchance some trembling beauty! Ha, thou start'st!
Come, sir—thy life or mine!

GODFRID.

I know thee, Essex, and would spare thy life,
In pity to thy youth!

ESSEX.

Doth guilt then sit so deeply on thy soul,
That thus thou fear'st to die? Come—sir, come!

GODFRID.

E'en yet I fain would spare thee—get thee gone!

ESSEX.

Traitor! thou or I
Must sleep this night in Hades!

GODFRID.

Nay, then, die!

(They fight, and GODFRID *falls.)*

Oh, Essex! thou hast conquered, and I feel
My life is ebbing fast; bear my last words
To beauteous Editha!

ESSEX.

Pollute not with thy pois'nous breath, the name
Of so much excellence!

GODFRID.

Oh, Essex! Death is making rapid strides
O'er all my faculties; and yet to live,
And ever be an alien from the breast
Of her on whom my heart hath poured a flood
Of gushing tenderness—behold, her eyes
Cast forth disdainful lightnings that would blast
The fervid passion of my ardent soul—
Were far more terrible than 'tis to die,
And sink into nonentity! I feel
A cold and slimy substance slowly creep
O'er all my palsied limbs. Oh, this is Death
In all his ghastly hideousness! I die!
And dying, bless thee, Editha! O——h! [*Dies.*

ESSEX.

Peace to thy manes! Sweet Pity, cast thy veil
O'er his iniquities!

Enter ATHELSTAN *and* ANLAF, *fighting.*

ANLAF.

Yield thee, Athelstan! and save thy life
While yet 'tis mine to grant!

ATHELSTAN.

Never, false traitor, will I yield to thee,—
Vile murderer that thou art!

ANLAF.

No longer will I trifle with thee—die!
Die, thou puny thing!

(ANLAF *beats down the King, when* ESSEX *rushes forward and encounters* ANLAF. *They fight.*)

ESSEX.

Hold, murderer, hold!—nor dare to slay thy king!

ANLAF, (*falling.*)

Curses on thee! (*Dies.*)

(ESSEX *totters up to the King.*)

ESSEX.

My liege, thou'rt saved—I die! and dying, crave
You'll bear this jewel to Northumbria's queen,
And say, 'twas Essex sent it—his last words
And thoughts were all with her! May blessings 'light
Upon her beauteous head! [*Faints and falls.*

Enter KENT *and* OSCAR, CEDRIC *and* WULFSTAN, *fighting*, GLENDIG *and* SOLDIERS.

ATHELSTAN.

Forbear! forbear! just Heaven, forgive these men
The havoc of this day!

CEDRIC, (*seeing* ESSEX.)

Oh, my dear lord and master! truest soul
Of honour, art thou dead, and I yet live!
Too late to save thee have I come—yet not
Too late to avenge thee!

ATHELSTAN.

Alas, brave soldier! vengeance from on high
Hath fall'n upon his slayers.

KENT.

Oh, woful sight!—the best and truest knight
Of Christendom lies there!

ATHELSTAN.

Let a rude couch be made, to bear him hence
From this ensanguined field!

KENT.

What shall be done with these, our prisoners?

ATHELSTAN.

Let them be freed—the dragon's head hath fallen,
And with it future danger! There now lie
The traitors who concocted this deep plot,
Which hath o'errun our peaceful isle, and brought
Destruction on their heads!

CEDRIC, (*having carefully examined* ESSEX, *exclaims exultingly.*)

He lives!—he lives!—the noble Essex lives;
Ye Heavenly Powers, I thank thee!

ATHELSTAN.

Bind up his wounds, and bear him to our tent—
The leech awaits us there; this fearful sight
Doth harrow up my soul.

KENT.

False pride, and vain ambition, thou art lures
Doth make vain man resemble the foul fiends
In their incarnate deeds!

SCENE III. — *Saloon in Athelstan's Castle.*

EDITHA, (*solus.*)

What dire forebodings thus oppress my soul,
Turning the day to night! the glorious sun,
In all its godlike beauty, seems to cast
A bloody hue o'er all sweet Nature's works!
The earth seems parched with heat, and, as it opes,
Discloses pools of blood to my mind's eye,
Where silvery streams should flow.

(*Enter* ELGIVA.)

What news, my Elgiva? what makes thy cheek
So pale, thy eye so tearful? speak—oh, speak!

What news of dire import hath reached thine ear,
That thus thou art oppress'd?

ELGIVA.

The king is safe, the Danish princes slain,
And peace once more restored!

EDITHA.

Heaven be praised, for mercies thus vouchsafed!

ELGIVA.

Amen!

EDITHA.

And noble Kent, and Essex, and the rest
Of Britain's gallant sons?

ELGIVA.

Alas!

EDITHA.

What awful tale doth hang upon thy tongue,
That thou fear'st to give it utt'rance?

ELGIVA.

Patience, dear madam, I will tell you all,
If you will calmly hear me.

EDITHA.

Patience! just Heaven! torture me not thus;
But tell me all the evil thou hast heard,
E'en though it crush me with its fearful weight—
All—all; and I—I will endure it.

ELGIVA.

The brave Lord Essex——

EDITHA.

What wouldst thou say of Essex?—speak, oh, speak!
Oh, say not he is dead!

ELGIVA.

He lives, dear madam, but sore wounded—and
His life is much despaired of.

EDITHA.

Merciful Heaven!

ELGIVA.

I pray your grace be calm; there is without
One whom his lord doth trust; who fain would speak
From Essex to your grace.

EDITHA.

Oh, Elgiva! thou sayst, be calm! Go tell
The winds to stay their fury; bid the stars
To hide their glowing charms in night's dark veil—
Yon sun to cease to shine—wolves cease to howl—
Or man to cease to slay his fellow man;
But bid me not be calm! Oh, thou dear lord!
My life, my soul, my joy! and art thou fall'n
Beneath the treachery of these crafty Danes?
And shall I see thy godlike form no more,
Gaze on thy lustrous eyes, or hear thy voice
Fall on my o'erwrought ear?

ELGIVA.

I do beseech thee, dearest madam—see,
The soldier from Lord Essex; he may have
News of more joyful import.

EDITHA.

Yes, I will see him, and, perchance may hear
[*Exit* ELGIVA.
The last fond words of Essex. Oh, sweet Heaven!
This blow is all too much; and yet I bow
In dutiful submission to thy will.

(*Enter* ELGIVA *and* CEDRIC.)

Oh, hast thou come from Essex!—doth he live?
Deceive me not, I charge thee!

CEDRIC.

Lady, my tongue is not attuned to utter
Aught which is untrue.

EDITHA.

Pardon me, gallant soldier, if my words
Reflected on thine honour! Say, thy lord!—
How fares he?

CEDRIC.

The noble Essex lives!

EDITHA.

And is that all?—have you no word—no sign,
Sent from your lord to me?

CEDRIC.

Alas, sweet madam! (*Weeps.*)

EDITHA.

Good soldier, thou dost weep; and yet mine eyes
Refuse to join in unison with thine;
My heart is bursting, and my o'erwrought brain
Whirls with incessant motion; am I mad,

Or is it but a dream? Doth Essex live?
Good soldier, tell me all, ere my weak heart
Doth burst its earthly bonds.

CEDRIC.

Oh, lady! I am sorely sorrow-stricken,
And can scarcely speak for tears.

EDITHA.

Give them free vent; I would that I could weep,
And ease my heart's deep anguish.

ELGIVA.

Soldier, this weakness ill becomes thee; thou
Shouldst bear thyself more bravely.

CEDRIC.

Lady, I am corrected; but my love
Was like a parent's, and I treasured up
Each word, each look, the noble Essex cast
Upon his humble servitor; and felt
My life was all too short e'er to repay
Such kindness freely lavish'd.

EDITHA.

Speak yet of noble Essex; doth he live?
Or is he past all hope?

CEDRIC.

Lady, he lives! Kind Heaven, grant his wounds
Are not past leech's art! His ardent soul
Bore him into the thickest of the fight;
Wherever danger pressed, his glittering sword
Fell with the speed of lightning's flash; his eye
Sought out the various leaders of the foe,

Till he encounter'd Godfrid. The young Dane
Was brave and active; and his heavy blows
Fell with a warrior's ardour on the shield
Of warlike Essex, who gave blow for blow!
Each fought now for his life; the rebel Dane
At length was foil'd—brave Essex plunged his sword
Into the traitor's side, who, faltering fell,
And yielded up his spirit to his God.

EDITHA.

And Essex! was he wounded unto death?

CEDRIC.

His wounds e'en then were slight; but as he gazed,
And paused in sorrow o'er young Godfrid's corse,
King Athelstan and Anlaf did appear
Before his wondering eyes.

EDITHA.

Speak on, I charge you, soldier!—on your words
My life or death now hangs.

CEDRIC.

They came like famished tigers: on his foe,
Each look'd with lustrous eyes; the blood in streams
Oozed from their num'rous wounds. Anon, the king
Fell 'neath his powerful foe, who with a blow
Prepared now to despatch him. Essex rush'd
Beneath the upraised blade, received the stroke,
And saved his royal sire. The trait'rous Dane
Fell with redoubled fury on him. Life

Was now the stake each fought for—blow for blow
Was given and received.

ELGIVA.

Heroic Essex! Then he saved the king,
And lost his precious life?

CEDRIC.

'Tis not in nature to hold out full long,
When blood is teeming forth from countless wounds:
Fierce Anlaf fell, and, with his latest breath,
He cursed his conqueror.

EDITHA.

And your gallant lord?

CEDRIC.

With loss of blood, fell fainting at the feet
Of royal Athelstan. His latest words—
His only thoughts, dear lady, were of thee.

ELGIVA.

How mean you, sir?—did you not say he lives?

CEDRIC.

He lives; but life doth hang upon a thread;
He hath not spoken since.

(*A flourish of trumpets.*)

Enter ATHELSTAN, KENT, TURKETAL, *and* SOLDIERS, *bearing in* ESSEX.

TURKETAL.

All hail, victorious sire! Thus may your foes
Fall 'neath the vengeance of your warlike arms.

ATHELSTAN.

Oh, Turketal, it grieves our heart to see
The devastating horrors that hath fall'n
Upon this sinful people! Gracious Heav'n!
Who read'st the hearts of men, in pity spare
This land from a renewal of the scenes
That now disfigure it. That bleeding form
Is all that's left of Essex, whose brave arm
Struck down the sword of Anlaf, when 'twas raised
To rob thy king of life.

(EDITHA *advances.*)

Oh, dearest sister! once again we greet thee,
Though saddened are our hearts. Behold the man
Who saved thy brother's life!

(EDITHA *advances to* ESSEX, *and falls on her knees beside him.*)

EDITHA.

Oh, Essex—gentle, noblest, best of men!
Oh, let me gaze into thy dying eyes,
And read thy latent thoughts!

ESSEX, (*half rising.*)

Methought I heard a voice, whose mellow tones
Fell on my ravished ears.

EDITHA.

Oh, Essex, must thou die, and I still live
To see thee fade before me? Horror—horror!

ESSEX.

Hush! thou dear one—hush! Breathe not a sigh;

But let me die, gazing upon thine eyes,
Which speak of love and constancy. I've lived
Full long in sorrow, let me die in joy.

EDITHA.

And must thou die? Is there no hope—no aid,
To snatch thee from the jaws of death? My God!
And must this dear one die?

ESSEX.

Oh, speak again—blest angel, speak again
Those words of blissful joy!

KENT, (*aside to* ATHELSTAN.)

Oh, this is dreadful! Good my liege, I knew not
They loved each other thus.

ATHELSTAN, (*to* KENT.)

This blow hath struck me like a thunderbolt,
Sent from the hand of Jove!

EDITHA.

They shall not part us, Essex. We will soar
Together into realms of bliss; our faith
Shall not by death be severed.

ESSEX.

Come nearer, dear one—nearer! Thou hast fled:
I see thee not—my eyes grow dim. Sweet Heaven,
Receive my soul! and, oh, console this dear one!
Sweet love, thine hand! I feel an icy chill
Creep o'er my heart, and all is—bless thee—oh!

[*Dies.*

EDITHA, (*flinging herself upon the body.*)

Oh, Essex, stay—thou shalt not leave me thus!

Stern Death, thou shalt not part us! We will go
Together into realms of bliss! Thou'rt gone!
Then I must follow, too! [*Dies.*

(ATHELSTAN *and* KENT *approach.*)

ATHELSTAN.

Sweet sister, I beseech thee, leave this form
Of poor insensate clay. (*Attempts to raise her.*)
I pray you, Kent, lend me your aid; my wounds
Hath left me weak—I cannot raise this mourner.

(KENT *assists the King to raise her.*)

Come, dearest sister, cheer thee: bid thy heart
Arouse it from this deep affliction; cast
Thy thoughts on the Most High.

KENT.

Just Heaven! my liege, I fear her grace is dead!

ATHELSTAN.

Pray Heaven, avert that evil! Can it be
That life hath fled this form?

TURKETAL.

Already hath her limbs assumed the form
And chilly hue of death, her glassy eyes
Are fix'd and sightless, and her cheek is cold.
All, all, denote the presence of grim Death
In this most lovely form!

KENT.

Oh, let this tale of woe
Be carried far and near! Let poets tell,
In ages yet to come, this matchless pair

United were in death, though Heaven's decree
Divided them on earth !

ATHELSTAN.

And ye, vain rulers of this lower sphere,
Who fain would sacrifice ten thousand lives
Upon the altars of your sinful pride,
Behold these victims of the vengeful Mars,
Whose chariot wheels do crush the hearts of men,
And rend asunder all the links of life,
That an all-bounteous God hath form'd to bind
Man to his fellow man—behold ! thy works
Are weakly portray'd here.
We will not part
Those who are join'd in death ; let them be placed
Together in one tomb, and may their death appease
The Omnipotent wrath !

A FEW WORDS ON POETS,

Ancient & Modern.

IN TWO CANTOS.

*** The following Lines, when written, were intended as the first portion of a Series, in which the Writer contemplated taking a rapid survey of the different compositions of by-gone Poets, devoting to each work one short canto, and which, if it met with the approbation of the public, would have embraced most of the names, ancient and modern, distinguished in poetic literature.

A FEW WORDS ON POETS,

Ancient and Modern.

CANTO THE FIRST.

The Subject—Tasso, and his Jerusalem Delivered.

Spirits of ancient Sages, lend your fire,
To one who fain would wake the tuneful lyre,
And mount Parnassus with light airy wings,
And strike the mournful, or the mirthful strings.
First let me call from out the womb of time,
Immortal Tasso! son of southern clime;
Whose fiery soul did, like his native sky,
Shed a bright halo o'er fair Italy.
Oft have I pondered o'er his magic page,
Where stands depicted man's impotent rage;
Who, in Jehovah's holy name o'erspread
Thy fields, Jerusalem, with the mighty dead;
Who made thy rivers teem with human blood,
Thy limpid streams, become a crimson flood;
Who, in Christ's name, did with his image war,
And, with the cross, take up the scimetar;

Who preached the mercies of a righteous God,
Yet used the broad-sword as a chastening rod.
Such were the themes o'er which thy muse did soar,
Immortal Tasso, in the days of yore,
When valiant knight, with helmet on his brow,
For honour sought, e'en as man seeks it now ;
Not with deep learning's lore, or virtue's laws,
Did he attempt to prove how just his cause ;
But glitt'ring sword, or battle-axe, he plied,
To prove for mercy the Redeemer died !
Yet not alone of deeds of war hath sung
The heav'nly bard, whilst his sweet lyre was strung ;
But godlike virtues, which became the brave,
He to bold Richard and mild Godfrey gave.
Nor did he erst forget the Saracen,
Whose Arab steed flew o'er the sandy plain,
Like the simoom, which, ever as it flies,
Who once behold it, in its grasp soon dies !
Such was Saladin ; ever brave and true,
Who fought for freedom and religion, too !
Not his the hand would slay a fallen knight,
But rather shield him for a nobler fight :
To tempt him with high honours, or with gold,
To prove the Christian may be bought and sold ;
The holy cross e'en from his breast be riven,
And earth be purchased by the loss of heaven !
Yet while he tempted with a bribe his foe,
He honour'd him who would the bribe forego ;
And like a true and valiant knight he gave
The meed of honour to the nobly brave.

Why was it then, that such a gallant foe
Should, like a beast, be hunted to and fro?
Was it because the bounteous earth was given
To those who sought the Christian's road to heaven?
Or, was 't because a love of care and toil
Alone could tempt to leave his native soil
The valiant Briton, who his fatherland
Forsook awhile for Asia's burning sand?
Was it for this, the mirthful sons of France
Forsook alike the banquet and the dance—
Laid by the lance, that in the tournay flew,
And bade their sad and weeping loves adieu?
Or was 't for this, the sons of Bretagne went
To join with Austrians in one armament?
And thus advance in long and measured line,
To seek for conquest in famed Palestine;
Led on by him, who, in the needful hour,
Betray'd brave Richard when within his power:
Who basely held in bondage Britain's chief,
Who scorned the tyrant as a trait'rous thief,
With that fierce prophet, who led on the van,
And call'd on man to slay his fellow man.
Oh, rash impiety, to raise a flame
Of fiery passions in Jehovah's name!
To preach Christ's mercy to an armèd band,
Together leagued to devastate the land;
To raise the falchion and the glitt'ring shield,
To strew with human bones each verdant field;
To raise the vulture and the grisly bear,
The fierce hyena from his midnight lair;

To call the tiger from his dark abode,
Or spotted leopard to drink up man's blood :
Which rushes forth from many a gaping wound,
As the maim'd warrior sinks upon the ground ;
Then as he wildly turns his eyes to heaven,
His bleeding form is by the wild beasts riven ;
His quiv'ring flesh, while life fast ebbs away,
Torn from his bones by rav'nous beasts of prey—
Such were the scenes of war in olden time,
When Christian warriors sought the eastern clime ;
When, for Jerusalem and the Holy Land,
Christian and Pagan made a deadly stand—
When " Allah ! Allah !" the brave Paynim cried,
As for his faith he nobly fought and died :
Trusting that he should with Mahomet rise,
And dwell with Houris in fair paradise !
Such was his faith, and such his father's creed,
And for that faith he bravely dared to bleed.
While Christian warriors near the sacred tree,
Where Jesus died upon Mount Calvary !
Their voices raised, a meek, yet mighty host,
To God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost !
Then for their faith imbued their hands in blood,
And stain'd all nature with the crimson flood ;
Not theirs the crime, but his, that hoary friar,
Who raised the fiend of War with words of fire,
And roused the tempest in man's stormy breast,
Where warring passions seek in vain for rest ;
Who for vain glory and the phantom Fame,
Slew countless thousands in the Saviour's name !

Not thus our Lord, who with abundant love
Meekly descended from his throne above !
To take upon himself man's sin and guilt,
Ere for mankind his precious blood was spilt ;
As, from his side, the crimson stream did flow,
He sued for pardon for his deadly foe ;
Nor did one murmur ere escape his lip,
When in derision they in wormwood dip
The sponge, already steep'd in bitter gall ;
But to his Father, humbly did he call.
" Father, they know not what they do !" he cried ;
Then yielded up his precious soul, and died.
Such was the meekness of the blessed Lord ;
Words were his weapons, not the keen edged sword ;
He preach'd to all, that peace, good will, and love,
Were surest passports to the realms above :
Not thus stern Peter, who in Christ's dear name,
Stirr'd up man's passions into a fierce flame ;
Which, ere it ceased to shed its baleful light,
Destroy'd vast myriads in inhuman fight :
Robb'd Christendom of all the great and good,
Made human flesh become the wild beast's food ;
Taught the fierce Pagan, that the Christian's God,
Like filthy Moloch, lived on human blood ;
Made mothers weep for sons, who, in their prime
Fell easy victims to that burning clime ;
Made children orphans, while lone widows wept
Their much loved husbands, who in death now slept

Upon fair Asia's hot and burning sand ;
Made earth a hill, o'er all the Holy Land.
Such were the deeds that earn'd a deathless name
To that fierce hermit, who stirr'd up the flame :
So sings immortal Tasso ; and his strain
Depicts stern Peter as a son of Cain,
Whose fiery zeal o'er mankind held control
Till death divided body from the soul.
Alas ! how many follow in his wake,
And in Christ's name sad desolation make ;
Depicting horrors of a ghastly hue,
To all who worship God, not as they do :
And in religion's pure and holy name,
Light up a blaze of foul sulphureous flame,
Destroying in its wild, ungovern'd might,
The choicest gift of God—the lustrous light,
Which at their birth to all mankind was given,
To guide their souls the surest way to heaven.

CANTO II.

The Subject — SHAKSPEARE, AND HIS HAMLET.

HAIL to thee, Shakspeare ! bard of Avon, hail !
Thy name floats ever on the ambient gale ;
Where'er fair Britain's sons their vigils hold,
Thy deathless fame will never rest untold.
For who would dare to boast a Briton's name,
And not uphold immortal Shakspeare's fame—
Who, with a giant spring, at once did leap
Like some dread spirit, from the mighty deep,
And fling around him, in his tuneful strain,
Spirits of air, to float upon the main ;
Or dive beneath the mighty ocean's wave,
And scan the mermaid's deep and mystic cave ;
Behold the treasures of her coral home,
Which tempts the hardy mariner to roam
Far from his native land, that he may share
Some of those precious pearls which gem her hair ;
Or peep into death's deep and dark abyss,
Where Charon wafts the blessed soul to bliss ;
Or plunges into Lethe's turbid wave,
The guilty soul, whom riches could not save !
His was the hand, by which the magic wand
Was gently raised ; when lo ! at his command,

Came forth a train of noble knights, to yield,
With courtly trappings and emblazon'd shield,
Unto the despot's most tyrannic sway
True knightly homage, his behests obey ;
Yet not alone did knights his bidding do,
For kings and queens, in number not a few,
At his dread nod, came forth again to wear
The crowns o'erloaded with a world of care.
Again he waved his magic wand, when lo !
Came forth a host of rare and costly show,
Deck'd out in gems, which rivall'd in their glow
The wearer's bosom, white as driven snow ;
All beauteous virgins, fair and young, and coy,
Fit food for Cupid—that wild urchin boy,
Who, with a laugh that makes each virgin start,
Plants his keen arrow in their youthful heart.
There I beheld Ophelia, young and fair,
Twine beauteous garlands in her glossy hair ;
Flow'rs pluck'd from thorns, which in wild hedges grew,
Convolvulus white, and of a purple hue ;
The bluebell lent its sweet and simple bloom,
To join the woodbine with its mild perfume ;
Then came the jasmine sweet, the modest rose,
The loveliest flow'r that in the garden grows ;
Ranunculus, too, its brilliant colours vie,
With rich carnations of the deepest dye ;
The myrtle, too, its glossy leaves were seen,
Twine with the ivy in the mystic scene ;

The primrose sweet, its odours scent the air,
The cowslip bright, and daisy, too, was there :
No shrub that grows, or flower that's known to man,
But in that garland I could plainly scan ;
And as the love-lorn virgin bound it round
Her snowy brow, she sank upon the ground ;
And on her love despondingly she cried,
When Hamlet stood by fair Ophelia's side ;
And in her eyes he gazed with speechless awe,
While in his breast did busy demons war.
For fair Ophelia was of sense bereft,
And his the hand that her poor brain had cleft,
When, in the chamber of the lustful queen,
He slew Polonius, hid behind the screen ;
The fatal blow, that slew her aged sire,
Deprived Ophelia of bright reason's fire.
Not his the crime : oh, rather let it fall
Upon that traitorous pair, who caused it all—
The treach'rous brother and adult'rous wife,
That robb'd the king, and husband, too, of life,
Destroy'd the hopes of that young loving pair,
And shed their sweetness on the desert air !
Next, I beheld Ophelia, on her bier,
Where Hamlet shed the unavailing tear ;
Then came Laertes, whose proud and fiery soul
Taught the brave youth to spurn unjust control ;
Then I beheld the lewd, unhallowed pair,
Whose guilty souls shrank 'neath the demon Fear ;

Around their couch I seem'd to wend my way,
While fiends were mocking at their worthless prey;
Next, to the ramparts I my way then took,
While heavy footsteps on the silence broke:
Methought I saw beneath the moon's pale light,
A ghastly form, with visor raised, alight,
As 'twere from out a dark and fleecy cloud;
When, as I gazed, the cock sent forth aloud
Its warning notes, which made the phantom shrink,
And vanish o'er the rampart's dizzy brink.
Again I gazed upon that fearful form,
When winds were howling to the midnight storm—
When the pale moon, beneath the ruddy light
Of forked lightning, vanished from my sight—
When the loud winds in anger roar'd aloud,
And lofty trees before the storm low bowed—
I saw stalk forth with slow and solemn tread,
The phantom, or the spirit of the dead;
His visor raised, exposèd to the view
His pallid features of a ghastly hue;
His eyes, that erst like lightning glanced around,
Now firmly set, were cast upon the ground—
When, as I gazed with speechless, trembling dread,
Upon that form of Denmark's mighty dead,
A palsied shiver quiver'd through my blood,
As, with clasp'd hands and fixèd eyes, I stood;
When, lo! I heard him say, in hollow tone—
"He is not here, my son, my only son!"
E'en as the sounds fell on my list'ning ear,
Quick measured footsteps I could plainly hear;

I turn'd my eyes, and on the ramparts saw
Young Hamlet stand, in speechless, trembling awe.
The dew-drops hung upon his princely brow,
As to the phantom he did lowly bow:
"Hail!" cried the awe-struck youth—"hail, royal sire!
Hail, Denmark's royal chief! Ere I expire
With wonder and amazement, father, say,
Why from the tomb thy form doth nightly stray?
Why is it, that thy soulless shape I see,
In midnight's solemn hour, arm'd cap-à-pié?
Is it because some deadly sin doth dwell
Within thy bosom, making there a hell?
Or is't because some fearful weight of woe
Hangs o'er my fatherland, and makes it throe
In fearful agony, and ope its womb,
Casting the dead up from the mould'ring tomb,
Wherein their bones full long have been at rest?
Say, in Heaven's name! art thou not with the bless'd?"
He paused: the phantom shook its armèd head,
Then glided forward with a noiseless tread:
"I am thy father's spirit," he replied;
"'Tis said, that through a serpent's sting I died.
Hamlet, that serpent was a wanton wife;
Hers was the sting that took thy father's life;
No reptile's venom did my pure blood stain,
But by my brother I was basely slain.
Urged on by lust, that foul and loathsome thing,
To slay thy father, his liege lord and king,

The traitor came, and, with dire malice fraught,
Throughout my orchard he his victim sought:
He found me, as I oft was wont to lie
Upon the greensward, 'neath the azure sky;
There as I lay, ne'er thinking of aught ill,
The traitor came, with leperous distil,
More deadly than the fatal shaft that flies
From the fierce adder, when, with glist'ning eyes,
He gazes on his victim, ere he springs,
And with his slimy form around him clings,
Nor e'er releases from his fearful fold
The body of his prey, till dead and cold;
So came the traitor in the noon-day's heat,
And, serpent-like, fell cringing at my feet;
Then raised himself upon his bended knee,
Prepared to murder, or to basely flee.
I slept; and as I slept, a fearful dream
(That I was struggling in foul Lethe's stream,
While mocking fiends in mine ears did howl,
And welcome to their dark abode my soul;
Which from the foul contagion seemed to shrink,
And cling to life upon death's dizzy brink)
Came o'er my sleeping senses, and I rose
In terror, unrefresh'd from my repose;
E'en then, methought I felt a fearful pain
Rush on like wildfire through my dizzy brain;
My blood seem'd boiling in my swelling veins,
My body rack'd with most unusual pains.
I cast my eyes in agony around,
And saw the traitor lie upon the ground,

While with one hand a poniard bright he grasp'd,
The other held, within its tighten'd clasp,
An empty phial, whose foulness fill'd the air,
And spread corruption o'er the atmosphere.
I quickly turn'd, o'erwhelm'd with fear and ire,
While through my head a flame of liquid fire
Seem'd madly rushing o'er my frenzied brain,
And all my limbs were rack'd with deadly pain.
I strove to reach the murd'rer; but I fell,
And what I suffer'd it were vain to tell.
I lay upon the cold and clammy earth,
Till pain and anguish drew my spirit forth:
Then I descended through the yielding earth,
Where laughing fiends caroused in boist'rous mirth,
And echo answer'd in my wond'ring ear
The shouts that filled my soul with awful fear.
Soon I arrived at the infernal gate,
Where Satan sat in majesty and state:
Him I beheld, while round his throne there stood
A vast assemblage of hell's chosen brood.
'Hail!' cried the arch fiend, in my awe-struck ear—
'Hail, Royal Denmark! welcome art thou here.'
Then through the vaulted cavern rang a cheer,
Which echoed wildly through my palsied ear;
While busy fiends around my form did flock,
And, with grimaces foul, my fears did mock;
Then Satan summon'd to his councils one
Who calmly stood before the arch-fiend's throne;
And as he spoke in slow and measured pace,
Each fiend in silence gazed upon his face;

Soon I was borne into hell's dark abyss,
But more, my son, I may not tell of this,
Or else my tongue could such a tale unfold
Would turn the current of thy life-blood cold,
Dry up the marrow in each supple bone,
And turn thy warm heart into one of stone;
Such are the pangs which I am doom'd to bear,
For unrepented sins, committed here.
Each stormy night, when winds their vigils keep,
And man awaketh from his troubled sleep,
Or when the moon, beneath the lightning's glare,
Doth vanish in the hazy atmosphere;
When glimmering stars withhold their twinkling light,
And earth lays hid beneath the cloak of night—
At such an hour I'm doom'd to leave my cell,
Where I have suffer'd that I may not tell,
And walk once more upon my native soil,
To terrify the sons of honest toil;
But not alone for this my ghostly form
Doth brave the terrors of the midnight storm,
But that my son might know to whom he owes
His father's death, and Denmark all her woes."
He ceased, while Hamlet, with clasp'd hands did cry,
"Bright Jesus! hear me, in thy native sky!
And thou, poor Ghost, bear witness that I swear,
I will avenge thee, on thy murderer!
Yea, while this brain doth in its caves remain,
Or my warm blood doth course throughout each vein,

No other thought shall in my bosom dwell,
Till I have sent the murd'rer down to hell."
Thus spoke the Prince, when unto him again
The Ghost replied, in sad and mournful strain—
"I find thee apt, and dull wert thou indeed,
More dull than Lethe's foul and noxious weed,
Didst thou not stir in this; yet, Hamlet, hear—
Strike not thy mother with the vengeful spear,
But, for thy trait'rous uncle, Hamlet, slay,
E'en as thou wouldst the reptile in thy way,
The foul, adult'rous murd'rer, though he stood
Before the altar of the living God."
As thus he spoke, the thunder loud did roar,
And rain in torrents from dark clouds did pour,
Loud scream'd the owlet from his nightly post,
As thus communed Prince Hamlet and the Ghost:
The glowworm o'er the earth now cast its light,
Which the poor Ghost beheld with much affright;
And with his finger pointing to the glow,
Vanish'd, and left the Prince o'erwhelm'd with woe.
Awhile he stood, while o'er his princely brow
The lightning flung a pale and livid hue;
Then to high heaven he raised his tearful eyes,
While from his breast came forth unnumber'd sighs:
"Great God, who sits upon the eternal throne
Of heaven's majestic vault, and looketh down,
And all ye hosts of heaven, who at his nod,
Do sing the praises of a righteous God,—
And ye, dark fiends, whom he hath doom'd to dwell
For evermore in tortures in deep hell,—

Where, 'neath the shadows of perpetual night,
Grim shadows prowl, or where the sulphurous light
Doth spread its foul and pestilential glare—
Ye fiends of darkness, hear me, as I swear,
I never more will rest, by day, or night,
Till vengeance on the murd'rer's head alight!"
He said; then upward turn'd his tearful eye,
And thus I left him in sore agony.

Again, I gazed upon young Hamlet's face,
And anguish in each lineament did trace;
Around him sat a proud and glitt'ring train
Of Denmark's noble sons, who, not in vain,
Had met that day to see combatants stand,
And for their precious life fight hand to hand;
Around the circle, as I cast mine eye,
I saw fair Denmark's proudest chivalry;
While seated in the galleries above,
Were beauties fitter for the feast of love,
Than thus to grace with all their lustrous charms
The field prepared for deadly feats of arms.
Oh, who could gaze upon that bright array
Of virgins, lovely, beautiful, and gay;
Behold the smile that beam'd in each bright eye,
As each fair bosom heaved a gentle sigh—
Mark each soft cheek, whereon the roses bloom,
More graceful seem'd, or feel the soft perfume,
Which from their coral lips, in joyous strain,
Fell sweet and grateful as the gentle rain

Which o'er all nature doth its treasures yield,
And with sweet moisture renovate each field—
And not regret that such a gorgeous train
Were met to see man shed man's blood in vain?
'Twas even so, and o'er the scene of strife
Presided Denmark's proud, lascivious wife,
While by her side the treach'rous brother stood,
Whose guilty soul was deeply dyed in blood,
Which, like the blood of Abel from the plain,
For vengeance call'd, and call'd not all in vain.
Beside the lecherous pair young Hamlet stood,
In solemn silence, and no loving mood;
His eye glared round the field, ordain'd to be
A spot for ever stain'd with infamy;
Laertes came, the bold, impassion'd youth,
Who had not then been there, but that the truth,
Beneath aspersions foul, unnumber'd lies,
Was basely hid, for which young Hamlet dies.
The bugle now sends forth its notes of war,
And echo answers echo from afar;
The lists prepared, the foes now take their stand,
And for their lives they fight now, hand to hand;
Not long, alas! they struggle, ere the tide
Of blood runs streaming from their wounded side—
They pant, they stagger, on the earth they roll,
When Denmark's queen doth quaff the poison'd
bowl;
The foil's sharp point, whereon the venom'd sting
Of subtle poison, by the traitor king,

Was thickly laid, had penetrated deep
The youthful Hamlet's flesh, and made it creep.
He reels, he sinks, but, ere his life hath flown,
He strikes the foul adult'rous murd'rer down,
And deep within the guilty monster's breast
He plants the weapon, and there lets it rest:
The poison soon its venom doth impart,
And searches through each victim's bleeding heart;
Till Death, the stern despoiler, as they lay,
Claims mother, son, and uncle, as his prey.

Such are the themes of which thy muse hath sung,
Immortal Shakspeare, while thy harp was strung:—
That harp, whose notes vibrate on ev'ry shore,
And will do so till time shall be no more.

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS.

STANZAS ON LOVE.

How bright is the sun when at morn it doth rise,
Shedding bright beams of gladness all over the earth!
But brighter to me are my own dear one's eyes,
When melting in sorrow, or glist'ning with mirth.

How dark are the clouds which at midnight appearest,
When winds from the westward doth sullenly blow!
But darker by far is the brow of my dearest,
When anger doth lend to her features its glow.

How bright are the stars which high above glitter,
How sweet is the dew which at ev'ning doth fall!
But brighter and sweeter is the smile that doth flitter
Around the sweet face of a beautiful girl.

How chaste are the beams of the moon's soften'd glow,
As proudly she soars in the heavens above!
But chaster by far is the bosom of snow,
Of woman, dear woman, the woman I love!

How sweet is the breeze, as it comes from the ocean,
Whose ruffled green bosom it gently doth kiss!
But sweeter by far is the fond heart's devotion,
When true love doth dwell in that mansion of bliss!

How bright are the hopes of the seaman, as leaving
His dear native land, he the sail doth unfurl!
Still he watches the shore, as his boat's prow is cleaving
The waves, as in eddies they gracefully curl.

How drear is the prospect, when night's mantle falleth
Above him, around him, in one darken'd form;
Yet the mariner's heart no danger appalleth—
He loveth a calm, yet he fears not a storm.

For the bold seaman knows that a true heart is beating
Within his rough breast, which all danger defies;
His thoughts are now turn'd on his dear one's last greeting,
And the fond recollection brings tears to his eyes.

He beholds her in fancy, around his form clinging,
He feels o'er again her last soft, fond embrace;
Then loudly her praises he soundeth by singing,
With love's fervent pathos, her virtues and grace.

And such are the pleasures which love doth delight in,
No matter the country, the climate, or caste;
Though some may love drinking, and others love fighting,
We all love dear woman the longest and last.

Then a health to dear woman, the old or the young,
Be she fair as a blonde, or dark as deep jet—
I love each sweet face, and each soft prattling tongue,
But I love best of all my own little pet.

Oh, how my heart beats as I gaze on her features,
And play with the ringlets which grace her pale brow,
She's surely the loveliest of all heaven's creatures
That e'er condescended to dwell here below.

Her cheeks are like lilies and roses entwining,
To deck with their beauties some favourite tree;
Her heart is the seat where Love sits reclining,
And casting his arrows around him with glee.

I love to gaze on her, while gently I'm pressing
Her soft taper fingers within my own palm,
And fancy I feel, in the soft hand's caressing,
The flame of pure love her soft bosom doth warm.

How dearly I love, with one arm round her waist,
While the other hand plays with her long silken hair,
To pillow my head on her soft snowy breast,
And banish awhile the world's troubles and care.

For life is at best but a burthen and sorrow,
And love, 'tis well known, oft a traitor doth prove:
Let's enjoy life to-day, then—who knows but to-
morrow
May bring forth a storm that's destructive to love.

Then here's to the minute, and here's to the hour,
I first saw my love by the sun's dazzling light ;
And here's to the godhead of love's magic pow'r,
Who plants in each bosom a fund of delight !

And here's to fair Venus, the bright queen of beauty,
Whose form in my dear one I fancy I view !
But pleasure must now give way to stern duty,
So fondly, but sadly, I bid her adieu !

OH, I LOVE TO RIDE ON THE OCEAN WIDE.

Oh, I love to ride on the ocean wide,
When the fierce winds loudly roar ;
I love to roam, on its billowy foam,
As it lashes the rock-girt shore ;
For though there's a charm in a gentle calm,
To gaze on the pale blue sea,
Yet my bosom doth warm to the raging storm,
For that, too, hath charms for me.

'Tis a glorious sight, on a summer's night,
To gaze on old Ocean's breast ;
When the moon's pale ray o'er its bosom plays,
As it silently takes its rest.

Its bosom then seems, like our childhood's dreams,
Innocent, calm, and serene ;
And the stars which glow, in the waters below,
Enchantment adds to the scene.

But when the great deep awakes from its sleep,
And flingeth its foam on high ;
When its heaving breast, like a warrior's crest,
Tow'rs proudly toward the sky ;
When the waves, as they rise, man's power defy,
And laugh at his fragile form ;
When each bounding wave a fresh victim doth crave
For the Demon of the Storm.

Oh, then, as I see, in wild revelry,
It dashing the barque on shore ;
And the crested wave form a human grave,
And take what it cannot restore—
I think, while I gaze, with fear and amaze,
On the foaming waters wild,
How fearful is wrath when it is once call'd forth
From a breast so calm and mild.

Then the boundless sea appeareth, to me,
Like creatures on this our earth ;
For when its soft breast doth tranquilly rest,
'Tis like a young child at its birth ;

And when, in its wrath, it belloweth forth,
And soareth toward the sky,
'Tis like the fierce brand in a warrior's hand,
As his foes around him die.

Then let us all pray for that glorious day,
When the sword in peace shall rest;
And the tale be told, that in days of old
Mankind one another oppressed:
When that glorious light, resplendently bright,-
Which gleams in the heavens above,
Shall illumine each heart, bid discord depart,
And earth be a region of love.

"GOD SAID, LET THERE BE LIGHT."

"God said, Let there be light!" and o'er the earth
And ocean's wat'ry waste, o'er hills, o'er vales,
And o'er the sombre vault of heaven, erst wrapp'd
In deepest hue of night, the glorious sun
In gorgeous splendour burst; and as its beams
Shone forth at *His* command, each living thing
That dwells on earth or in the humid air,
Or in the rivers deep, or ocean's wide
And soft expansive bosom, whose white foam,
In mountain waves doth rise with fitful roar,
Like mighty cataract, or silent flows
In its majestic course; or, in deep caves,

Which Nature, in her wild convulsions, formed
Beneath the ocean's surface; or where rocks
Rise high amid the rushing waters—huge,
Gigantic masses, tow'ring to the sky,
Like some vast monster of the deep, whose limbs,
Colossal-like, do gird the mighty deep
Within its ample stride, and thus outvie
And far surpass in splendour puerile man's
Frail, evanescent works,—sent forth a cry
Of loud and grateful joy, as with its warmth,
All nature was revived. And this was day—
The first which ever dawn'd, which *His* right hand
Did out of chaos form. For ere the sun
Was made to rule the day, no day was there
To earth-born-creatures; neither was there night,
For all was sleeping, save the awful form
Of heaven's Eternal King! who, as *He* spoke—
Who spoke not e'er in vain, beheld with joy
Unutterable, *His* own immortal face
In the celestial fire that thus appear'd
Hung in the heavenly vault; and heard the choir
Of heavenly seraphs, with angelic strains,
Sing—"Holy, holy, infinite, and just!
That is, and was, and shall be evermore."
God saw that it was good, and gave command
That it should rule the day: to rule the night,
He bade the moon ride o'er the darken'd sky
In silent grandeur, flinging her chaste beams
O'er all *His* mighty works—her mellow light,
As beautifully mild, serenely soft,

As that pure virgin, who, in after time,
Brought forth *His* own anointed Son, to bear
The heavy burthen of man's heinous sins
Upon his guiltless head—hung in the air,
And shed a lustrous halo o'er the earth:
Beneath her gentle beams the lover sighs,
And pours love's magic words into the ear
Of some fair, timid, yet approving maid,
Whose modest blushes all unseen do rise
Beneath the mellow light, as she doth press
The hand which trembling grasps her own, and feels
The warm blood thrilling through its every nerve,
As, with impassioned words, and eyes, whose fire
Would fright the timid virgin, were their glance
Not hid beneath the deep'ning shades of night,
He pleads his earnest cause: yet not alone
Doth the fair vestal orb display her light
O'er the dark horizon; for myriad stars,
In countless multitudes, do cast a glow
O'er all creation's works; those brilliant gems,
E'en as a wreath of glittering diamonds, bound
Around the brows of royalty, do grace
The courtly palace; or, as precious stones
Of ruby, topaz, emerald, or pearl,
Do add fresh lustre to the peerless charms
Of some fair daughter of illustrious race,
Decked out in all the wealth of famed Golcond,
To grace the nuptial couch; those dazzling rays
Of heavenly radiance, o'er the distant sky
Diffuse their sparkling light, and make weak man,

While gazing upward at the vaulted arch
Of heaven, admire, and worship in his works
The mighty hand of God.
For who can stand
And gaze upon the starlit canopy
Of the eternal vault, whereon the throne
Of everlasting power, and love, and might—
Surrounded by archangels, whose loud voice,
In hallelujahs, hail their Lord and King—
Is fix'd to all eternity, or gaze
Upon the radiant queen of night, or cast
His eye unshaded up toward the sun,
Which in effulgence glows, and dare affirm,
In solemn mockery, there is no God!
"God said, Let there be light;" when quickly sprang
A dazzling ray of light in man's rude breast,
Henceforth to cheer his earthly path, to guide
Him in his earthly course. "Let there be light;"
What potent power is in those few short words!
"Let there be light!" let every soul rejoice
In Heaven's eternal gift! "Let there be light"
To cheer the humble, and exalt the just!"
"Let there be light" o'er earth, and sea, and sky,
In howling wilderness, in verdant groves,
In gilded halls, in cotter's humble shed!
"Let there be light," that every living soul
May feel its influence benign, and fall
Before the Almighty Giver, and bow down
In silent thankfulness. "Let there be light"

To chase the demon Guilt, and his vile host
Of howling cormorants, from every clime
Whereon the fiend hath set his cloven hoof.
"Let there be light!" Ye legislators, hear,
And hear it not unheeded: God hath said,
"Let there be light!" Obey *His* dread command.
Let universal light be shed o'er all
His erring creatures; let all hearts rejoice
In universal light; let knowledge spring
Forth from the mental darkness that too long
Hath ruled o'er every land; let learning find
A place in every human breast, to shed
Its glorious rays of everlasting light:—
Then will all nations rest in peace; their sons,
In virtuous deeds, each with late rivals vie—
The sword neglected, in the scabbard rust,
And war's rude turmoil cease—regenerate man,
In blissful peace dwell with his fellow man;
And the Omniscient eye at length behold
His glorious image, shadowed forth in man,
Pure, as at the creation—ere the world
Was tenanted by evil; ere the ray
Of heavenly light was shadowed by the fall
Of disobedient man.

TEIGNMOUTH, SOUTH DEVON.

[The following stanzas were written to please a friend, residing at Teignmouth, who requested me to write something in rhyme, upon his birth-place.]

Pray, list awhile, ye men of Teign,
Whose river joins the foaming main,
And think not that I would pass o'er
Unheeded thy bold, rock-girt shore.
Oft have I stroll'd along thy Den,
Or boated o'er thy queenly Teign,
And gazed with joyous rapture o'er
The trackless sea ; from thy fair shore
Beheld the star-lit canopy
Of heaven's eternal, boundless sky,
As silently beneath my feet
The waters, in a glassy sheet,
Came sweeping on with crested foam,
Wafting the hardy seaman home:
And I have thought what joy would be
Shed o'er his humble family,
As gaily he has leaped on shore,
To clasp them to his breast once more—
That breast, where thoughts of wife and child,
All fears and sorrows had beguiled ;

And I have fancied with what joy
He clasp'd his wife, and infant boy ;
Then wept, and smiled, and with caress
Enhanced by love's impassion'd kiss,
He with endearment to them clung,
In speechless joy which had no tongue :
Yes, I have fancied such a scene,
As I have stroll'd along thy green ;
And thought so warm a welcome home
Would almost tempt a king to roam.

And I have stood amid the throng
Of happy creatures, old and young,
And cast my eyes o'er thy green hills,
Which, rising in the distance, fills
The limner's canvas with a view,
If fairly portray'd, grand and true.
And Fancy, with her num'rous train,
Hath freely scamper'd through my brain,
Enhancing all that I have seen
Or heard of thee, sweet flowing Teign.
In visions bright before my eye,
In quick succession, glided by
Soft, sweet, voluptuous female forms,
With swanlike necks and snow-white arms,
Cheeks radiant as the blushing rose,
Eyes whose long lashes half disclose
The melting softness of the sex,
Whom Heav'n ordained poor man to vex,

Tease, and torment; then with a sigh,
And tear-drop glist'ning in the eye,
To lead him in her silken chain
A willing captive back again.
Such are the wonders love doth work
O'er Christian, Pagan, Jew, or Turk—
Of ev'ry age, and every clime,
They have been rulers, from all time:
And ever will they hold their sway—
While love dictates, men must obey;
For with their smiles, and winning graces,
Gentle sighs, and lovely faces,
Soft, heaving bosoms, piercing eyes,
Poor man is taken by surprise;
And like the roving bee doth sip
The honey dew off beauty's lip,
And revel in the luscious stream
Till Death, the tyrant, ends the dream.

A VOICE FROM THE DEAD.

Come, dry up those tears, mother, cease thus to sigh,
Cast from you the gloom that now sits on your brow!
Remember, dear mother, your son dwells on high,
Nor pain, care, or sorrow, he'll ever feel now.

Oh ! how can you weep thus, and add to the gloom
Of father, and brothers, and sisters so kind ;
It will not recall your lost son from the tomb,
But add to the sorrow of those left behind.

Oh, think, dearest mother, that others must feel
The deep throbs of anguish—that others have eyes;
The tear-drops of sorrow, that down your cheeks steal,
Must add to those pangs which escape but in sighs.

Oh, think, dearest mother, my father must feel
The throb of affection around his heart cling ;
Let yours be the task, then, dear mother, to steal
From mem'ry the shaft that affliction doth fling.

Add not to the cup, that already is fill'd
With deep-rooted sorrow, one drop more of grief;
But labour with kindness, in which you are skill'd,
To give to yourself and each mourner relief.

Remember, that while on this earth I sojourn'd
All known means to save me were tried, but in vain;
And now, dearest mother, I must not be mourn'd,
For in heav'n I dwell, and am free from all pain.

MY MOTHER'S GRAVE.

Shade of my mother, once again I tread
The silent churchyard where thy ashes lie ;
Once more by filial love I'm hither led,
To ponder o'er thy much loved-memory.

Hard was thy fate, by nature form'd to shine,
And shed a lustrous halo o'er the earth ;
Yet round thy heart affliction did entwine—
Kind fortune shunn'd thee from thy very birth.

Oft do I fancy, in the silent night,
The music of thy much-loved voice I hear,—
That voice which fill'd my heart with pure delight,
Whene'er its accents fell upon my ear.

Thy form was cast in nature's fairest mould,
Thy heart was stored with love, a garner'd heap ;
That form, alas! now lies here, silent, cold ;
For death has call'd thee to thy long, last sleep.

Peace to thy manes ! no monumental bust
Records thy many virtues, or thy love ;
Thy body here's co-mingling with the dust,
Thy soul hath wing'd its flight to realms above.

LIFE AND DEATH.

An Allegory.

When Great Jehovah said, Let man be made
In our own image, breathed the breath of life
Into his nostrils, made him Lord of all
The birds and beasts that perish; when He said—
Go forth, increase, and multiply, till earth,
And air, and water, with their kind doth teem
In countless multitudes, He raised his hand,
And winged seraphs, round about the throne
Of their all-potent and imperial Lord,
Flew with submission, meek, and humbly bow'd;
Then cried aloud, Jehovah, Lord of lords!
He singled from the seraphs, as they stood,
With eyes cast down in sweet humility,
One of a noble and majestic mien;
And to his guardianship bequeathed weak man,
Whom he had placed in Paradise, to rule
Sole lord of all things new created, save
The tree of knowledge, and the tree of life,
Which were forbidden man to touch; but Eve,
Too easy tempted by the foul arch-fiend,
Did eat and give her lord forbidden fruit,
Who thus cast forth from Paradise, became
The sinful fount from which foul death did spring,

In loathsome hideousness. He then bestow'd
Upon his chosen seraph power to shield
Man from the tyrant Death; hence Life and Death
Have ever waged o'er the human form,
In His great name, an everlasting war.
'Twas morn, and o'er the azure vault of heaven
The sun in bright effulgence shed his beams,
When from the op'ning sky there did descend
Sweet Life, that erst had rested in the clouds,
To guard his num'rous charge; he halted not,
Till he had reach'd a palace, whose fair walls
Were hung with gorgeous tapestry, whose lord,
Old and enfeebled, one short year before,
Led to the altar of hymeneal rites,
A maiden young, and beautiful, and chaste,
As fair Diana. A foul sacrifice
To filial love and duty: her proud sire
Barter'd his daughter's happiness for gold,
And pride, and pomp, and power; thus she became
Thehoary dotard's bride. Around her couch
Stood skilful leeches and attendant nurse,
To welcome yet another soul on earth.
Life, that bright seraph, stood unseen, unheard,
And gazed in sorrow, as the mother's pangs
Now raised a gentle murmur, then burst forth
In one wild scream of anguish, not unmix'd
With sweet ecstatic joy, as from the womb
The new-born infant with loud cries came forth.
All now was hush'd—anon, the leech proclaim'd,
The precious stranger was a son and heir,

Which fill'd the suff'ring mother's heart with joy
Too great for her endurance, and she fell
Into a death-like swoon. Sweet Life approach'd,
And breathed his balmy breath o'er her pale brow,
Then vanish'd: as he fled, his glistening eye
Fell on grim Death, who at the palace gate
Stood silent, musing, and him thus address'd:
"Grim Death, avaunt! nor follow in my wake,
Where all is bright and joyous; thy gaunt shade
Doth, like a foul and loathsome pestilence,
Bring sorrow, grief, and woe."
The tyrant Death,
In tones of fiendish joy, to Life replied:
"I revel in my power; behind me stalks
Disease, in all its hideous form; my nod
Calls forth on beauty's cheek the hectic flush,
And bids her charms all wither; I can strike
With aim unerring, 'mid the battle's din,
And single out my victims, though a crowd
Environ them. Ha, ha! my power then dread,
Lest in my wrath I strike thee! Life, make way!
Nor dare attempt to stay my bold career."
"Back to thy dark abode! thou shalt not mar
The joy of that young mother, with thy form
Of vile impurity," sweet Life replied;
And, casting up his eyes to heav'n, behold!
The clouds did ope, and a bright flash of light
Abash'd the foul abortion of the fiend,
Who, howling, fled, and spread his pinions forth,
Which quickly bore him to the battle-field,

Where man, in fury, slew his fellow man.
" Ha, ha!" he cried, " 'tis here I love to ride,
Amid the thick and sulph'rous smoke—to cast
My darts around, unheeded and unseen;
Behold, mankind thus do my work—become
My willing slaves!" Anon, the rival hosts,
Met in the deadly conflict, heaps on heaps,
Beheld Death's shadow on that fearful day.
" Ha, ha!" he cried, and cast his darts around,
In countless numbers. " 'Tis a glorious sight
To see these murd'rous sons of Cain thus meet
In deadly fray; to hear the cannon's roar
Above the din of arms; to see the smoke
Rise and o'erspread the canopy of heaven;
While groan on groan rise from the teeming earth,
Like music most melodious to my ears!"
He paused; and as he gazed with eyes elate,
Sweet Life, that blessed seraph did alight,
From out an azure cloud. His radiant form,
Like burnish'd gold, shone through the drifting smoke,
As swift his aerial chariot sped along,
To stay the hand of Death. Behind him sat
Sweet Pity and her handmaids, whose bright eyes
Were fill'd to overflowing for man's woes.
" Son of incarnate fiend, who doth display
The malice of thy foul, malignant heart,
In every feature of thy hideous face—
Hence to thy dark abode! Hell's deep abyss
Now yawneth to receive thee!—Hie thee hence,

And hide thee in thy foul and loathsome cave,"
He said; and Death, in scornful tones, replied:
"I go, but ere I quit thee, gentle Life,
Behold the dainty dish I have prepared,
To feast thy tender eyesight, fill thy hands
With work enough, at least, for one brief day.
Call back the spirits to these bleeding clods
Of cold, insensate clay, restore those limbs,
And heal those ranc'rous wounds that ope their mouths,
To hail their benefactor. Ha! ha! ha!"
And then he stamp'd the earth, which op'ning wide,
Ingulfed his hideous form. Life gazed around,
With eyes brimful of tears, and thus he spake:
"Oh, ye who revel in your princely halls,
And in your spleen too oft unleash the hounds
Of wild, terrific Warfare—ye who stand,
And proudly speak of battles far away,
Go, tread the bloody field of death, when morn
Breaks forth in all its loveliness—behold
The teeming earth, satured with blood, where man
And beast, commingling in one fœtid mass
Of putrefying and corrupted flesh,
Deface the beauteous earth: list to the cries
That rise from thy poor victims—hear their groans,
Then place thy hand upon thy heart, and say—
'This is my work! for this I have been born
To wield a sceptre, or be call'd a king!'"
He ceased, and quickly o'er the blood-stain'd field
He spread his halcyon wings. A fragrant breeze

Now cast its mild and gentle influence
O'er man's enormity. Wherever Life
(However weak or torpid) did abide,
He breathed upon the suff'rer, and appeased
His dreadful agonies; then flung around
A fragrant essence, that did quickly fill
Their hearts with pure delight, caused loving forms
To flit before their mental vision, made
That field of horror to their eyes appear
A scene of quiet and domestic joy.
Anon, he bade sweet Pity summon forth
Her willing handmaids, to bind up the wounds
Of those poor suff'rers. Then he soar'd aloft,
And, by the noxious vapours that exhaled
From out the loathsome and detested form
Of his antagonist, he traced his way
O'er hills and valleys, rivers, mountains, plains,
Till o'er fair ocean's wide and watery waste
Foul Death he did espy; who, as he came,
Flung forth his forked darts, which harmless fell,
For Life was there to save. He raised his voice,
And thus address'd man's enemy:—"Again
I've traced thee out! Vile enemy of man,
And bitter foe to all that's great and good,
What awful deeds wert thou prepared to do,
That thus I find thee, o'er this wondrous waste
Of wild conflicting elements! Avaunt!
Thy shafts are harmless—Life is here to save:
Death's tyranny is o'er." Grim Death replied:—
"Oft dost thou thwart me, Life; thy potent pow'r

I cannot now compete with. What I can,
I'll do to mar the pleasures that doth fill
Thy heart to overflowing." As he spoke,
He cast malignant glances on his foe ;
Who with seraphic smile did thus reply :—
" My pleasures are of heavenly birth, and thine
Are of incarnate and unholy fiends
The foul outpourings. Do thy worst! I'm here,
With Heaven's help, to save whom thou wouldst slay."
He ceased, then spread his halcyon wings, and took
His aerial flight, till o'er a gallant barque,
Which long had lain becalmed—where health and strength
Had yielded to the foul incarnate fiend,
And his vile incubus—he paused, and saw
The crew all gazing o'er the clear blue sea,
Which, like a mirror, cast reflection back
Upon the gazers. Three long weeks had pass'd
Since they were thus becalm'd ; not e'en a breath
Of wind had stirr'd to cool the sultry air ;
Their water now was running short—their food
Had long been stinted—gaunt and grim Dismay
Sat on each haggard brow ; their sunken eyes
Show'd Death had marked them for his prey ; their fate
Was far beyond the aid of man—they felt
That Death was now upon them : but to die
Alone upon the waters, and to fill
With nauseous smells the sultry atmosphere,

Was awful to contemplate. Life now spread
His wings o'er that frail vessel; and there came
A gentle current of soft balmy air,
Which sent the warm blood mantling through their veins,
With all the freshness of their vigorous days.
Anon, the captain starts—a languid smile
O'erspread his manly features, as a breath
Of balmy air fell on his wrinkled brow;
Then to his mouth he raised a trumpet—cried
"All hands aloft! for see, the fresh'ning breeze
Already fills our canvas—we are saved!"
And now, stern Death, in wildest fury flies
Before the vessel's track, and loudly calls
From east, north, west, and south, the boisterous winds
To aid him, as he struggles for his prey.
Anon, the barque bounds o'er the roaring surge
With wild impetus: now, the lowering clouds
Burst forth like a volcano—vivid flakes
Of lightning fly around—the vaulted arch
Of heaven is opened—and the mighty deep
Expands its heaving breast, and, with a rush,
Bounds on and on—the waves in mountains rise,
And hurl the vessel up towards the clouds,
Which, bursting in one wild impetuous flood,
Doth dash her down into the dark abyss
Of wild ungovern'd waters,—all is now
Despair, as wildly o'er the boiling surge
The gallant barque is dashed a fearful wreck!

On, on—she rushes through the watery surf,
Sublime e'en in its anger!—on she glides—
Her helm's now washed away, her mainmast sprung,
Her bulwark's all stove in—her foremast now
Yields to the howling blast; yet, once again,
The captain's voice is heard: "Cut, cut!" he shouts;
"Clear all the wreck away!" The cannon booms,
Unheard by all, except that gallant crew,
Amid the howling of the angry blast;
And now the mizenmast, their only hope,
Yields to the raging tempest—snaps, and falls,
And crushes all beneath it! Now, she rights,
And, like a thing endowed with life, she floats,
And dashes from her prow the foaming waves!
As Life now spreads his wings, in ecstasy
They now espy a vessel, as she glides
Far o'er the trackless sea; the wind subsides—
The waters fall before the potent wand
Of Heaven's vicegerent. All is joy, as now,
Quick o'er the watery waste, the vessel comes
With canvas spread, and almost within hail.
Anon, the cannon booms; its echoes rise,
And ere they die away, are heard by those
Who ne'er refused a fellow-sufferer aid!
She comes, she comes!—her boat is launched—her crew
Give way with all their heart and soul!—they feel
The life of men now rest on every stroke.
Anon, the Seraph o'er their pallid cheeks

Breathed health and strength, then took his aerial flight
To other scenes; where'er stern Death appeared,
He followed in his trail, disputing hard
With his fell enemy, each human life
That he would fain destroy. The humble cot
Of toil-worn peasant, or the gilded halls
Of peer or potentate—o'er Afric's wilds,
Or Persia's perfumed shores; or where the rude
And untaught savage in his wigwam dwells,
Feasting on fruits and herbs; or where the fiend
Invests frail man with appetite, to gloat
And feed on human flesh their ravenous maw
With most infernal joy; or where the bright
And lovely daughters of fair Britain's isle
Doth sip rich nectar from the crystal cup,
Which, in return, reflects their radiant charms,
He took his aerial flight; and, as he passed,
Flung forth a perfumed essence, to assuage
The bitter pangs of Death, where'er his darts
Had left their venomed sting.

On India's shore
Life paused awhile: A Hindoo mother sat,
Gazing upon her offspring; and her heart
Beat audibly, as thus the mother spoke:—
"Gone is thy father to the Spirit Land,
And I, too, soon must follow; with his corse
My living form must burn; the funeral pyre
Already is erected that will make
Thee motherless, and me a fiery tomb."

And now grim Death approached with a foul train
Of Moloch's bloody and detested sons,
Who led the victim of their horrid rites
Of hellish superstition to the pyre,
Whereon the body of the dead was lain.
The priests now placed their victim, and began
With diabolic grimaces to chant
The funeral dirge ; when, springing from the wood,
A band of Christian warriors were led on
By that untiring Seraph (whose soft breath
Recalled again to life the fleeting soul),
And with their glittering spears they scattered wide
Foul Moloch's myrmidons ; then hurried off
The victim of their most unholy rites.
Again the two unceasing foes did meet
Within a little space ; grim Death was wroth,
And hurled his thunders o'er the Seraph's head,
Which harmless fell, as thus fair Life did speak :
" Rail on, rail on—thou foul and loathsome shape
Of unborn ugliness !—I thee defy :
For howsoever thou mayst hurl thy darts,
Immortal Life thou never canst o'ercome."
Grim Death, in fury, raised his horrid voice,
And thus the beauteous Seraph (who, in robes
Of dazzling glory stood) he did address :—
" Spread o'er the earth, or o'er the ocean wide,
Thy seraph wings, I'll follow in thy rear—
Dispute with thee each particle of clay,
Endowed with life but to succumb to Death."
To him the Seraph, smiling, thus replied :—

Weak are thy boastful threats ; for *He* alone
Who rules o'er heaven and earth can work me ill !"
And then he spread his wings, and soared aloft,
When Death, transported with fierce rage, let fly
His most envenomed shaft ; the Seraph turned
And waved his mighty wand o'er Death's gaunt shade,
Who, howling, fled to shun the Seraph's ire.

THE POACHER.

For three long weeks he vainly sought
Employment, far and near ;
His children nightly round him ran,
With hungry bellies, pale, and wan,
And eyes dimm'd with a tear.

He took them up upon his knee,
And thought his heart would break ;
" God help us now, my pretty dears !"
He said, while hot and scalding tears
Coursed down his furrow'd cheek.

" Gudewife," at length he fiercely cried,
" Our children must have bread !
I cannot, will not, sit supine,
And see them waste away, and pine—
Our children must be fed."

He rose, and left the humble cot,
And sought the forest glade ;
Beneath the branches of a tree
He sat, in silent agony,
Of ev'ry sound afraid.

At length he heard a rustling sound,
A hare came bounding by ;
He raised his stick, it whizzing fell—
He seized his prey—'twere vain to tell
How soon poor puss did die.

He hurried home, half mad with joy,
He quickly dress'd the hare ;
His children all, with fond caress,
Press'd on his lips a grateful kiss,
Well pleased with their choice fare.

Night came, and with it officers,
To drag him off to gaol ;
His wife's loud screams, his children's cries,
His own heart-breaking agonies,
Were all of no avail.

Morn came, and at the felon's bar
He stood, in woful plight ;
His haggard cheeks, his sunken eye,
Spoke, more than words, the misery
That urged him on that night.

The justice sat in solemn state,
With calm, portentous brow;
And sternly told him, if defence
He had, or pleaded innocence,
That he must do it now.

He cast his eyes around the court,
Saw none to plead his cause;
He raised his head, and thus he spoke—
"'Tis true, your worship, I have broke
One of my country's laws.

"I've seen the lord, the squire, the priest,
Ride on a foaming steed;
I've seen them hunt the timid hare,
Whose shrieks resounded in the air,
And made my own heart bleed.

"I saw my wife and children weep,
I heard them cry for food;
My brain with anguish madly whirl'd,
I cursed myself, and all the world,
And hurried to the wood.

"I slew the hare, I fed my babes,
The rest your worship knows!"
He ceased—a gentle murmur ran
Through crowded court, as that poor man
Related thus his woes.

The justice rose, and thus address'd
The pris'ner, as he stood:
"The case is clear; the laws must be
Obey'd alike by you and me—
'Tis for our country's good.

"This time, you only for one month
To prison will be sent;
But if you e'er again appear,
For poaching, you will find severe
Will be your punishment!"

A STORM AT SEA.

The sails were spread, the anchor weigh'd, the land
Was fast receding; still upon the shore,
In the far distance, many a kerchief waved
A last fond farewell to the gallant crew.
Farewell!—that word clings to the hero's tongue,
And draws the tear forth from the heart's recess
To glisten on his cheek—a cheek ne'er blanched
With coward fear—that word had pass'd. Farewell
To England, home, and all endear'd! They stood
Far off to sea, till like a tiny speck
In the vast horizon the vessel seem'd
To those poor watchers.
In deep agony
The captain stood, gazing across the deep,

Till daylight fading, hid the rocky shore
In night's dark mantle. Then he turn'd and sigh'd,
Then pass'd his hand across his eyes, and dash'd
Th' unbidden tear from off his furrow'd cheek ;
Then, with clasp'd hands, he raised his eyes to heav'n,
And silently breathed forth a fervent prayer
To the Almighty for his wife and babes.
Anon he starts, as o'er the deep'ning sky
A lurid glare of lightning darts along,
Casting a radiance o'er the rising surge,
Which, moaning now in fitful gusts, rush on
In fast increasing sheets of foam ; the wind
Now rends the flapping sails, ere yet the crew
Can furl them up ; the tatter'd canvas flies
In wild disorder o'er their heads. Anon,
The thunder peals in one continuous roar,
As though high Heav'n had summon'd all its host
To hurl destruction on that hapless crew.
The clouds now ope, in one continuous sheet
The rain in deluge pours, while black as night
The dismal sky becomes ; the breakers' roar
Is heard amid the tumult ; then a flash
Of lightning rolls along the darken'd sky,
Disclosing all the horrors of the scene
For one brief moment. All again is dark,
As though the seal of death had settled there
Upon that waste of waters. Now a wave,
With awful roar, doth bear the immerged barque
High on its swelling bosom ; then she falls,

And as she glides down in the foaming trough,
Again a mountain wave strikes her frail hull,
Clearing her decks of all and ev'rything
That late was stow'd with all a seaman's care.
Anon, amid the wind's incessant roar,
The captain's voice is heard; while at the wheel
Himself he stands, the bravest of the brave:
When, as he turns the wheel, a sullen wave
Comes on with fiend-like fury, strikes the helm,
And bears it far away. "All's lost!" he cries;
"Pray God, we ride out this tempestuous night!"
The well is sounded, and the dread report—
"Five feet of water in her hold!"—is made.
"Cheer up, brave hearts!" the captain cries—"our lives
May yet be saved. Man both the pumps! be smart;
What man can do, we yet will do. Our guns
Cast overboard; we shall not need their aid,
Save one, to fire a signal, should we ride
Throughout this awful storm! 'Twere now but waste
Of time, to us most precious: who could hear
The cannon boom amid this awful roar
Of wild conflicting elements!" He ceased;
Then to the pump he plied his vig'rous arms:
With courage most heroical he work'd,
And cheered with hope his poor despairing crew.
Again the well is sounded: water gains
On them apace. Three bells are scarcely past:
She cannot float till daylight! With a shriek
Of wild despair, the crew give up their toil,

As with an awful creak the hatches rise,
Disclosing to them at one glance the fate
That now awaits them. See, she settles fast!
Anon, a seaman rushes forth, and cries—
"Give us some grog, ere yet the vessel sinks!"
"Shame on ye!" cried the captain; "would you steep
Your coward soul in drunkenness? Weak man,
Prepare to meet your God, as man should meet
That awful Judge who lays all secrets bare!"
And now with curses in his mouth, the wretch,
Who fain would drown his cowardice in drink,
Sneaks forth from his commander, and in rage
Descends to meet that death he might have shunn'd.
Meantime a raft is made, and firmly lashed,
To aid them in their utmost need. She rolls.
"Cast forth the raft!" the captain shouts. "All hands,
Make ready now to spring!" Again she rolls,
Then settles fast, and, with an awful plunge,
Down, down, she glides into the dark abyss
Of deep, unfathom'd waters, ne'er to rise
Till heav'n, and earth, and sea again combine,
Leaving that hapless crew, amid the storm,
And deepest hue of night, to brave the deep,
Upon that frail and buoyant raft. Three days
And three long nights, all tedious, did they float
Upon the crested waves; nor food nor drink
E'er pass'd their lips, till Heav'n in mercy sent
A vessel to their rescue. They were saved!

A CALM AT SEA.

'Twas sunset, and the glorious god of day
Flung his bright shadows o'er the clear blue sea,—
In many bright, yet ever-changing tints,—
Making the placid waters, as they laved
The vessel's side, as like a graceful swan
She floated on its surface, look like streams
Of molten gold, or sparkling gems, full meet
To grace the brows of majesty.
He stood
With folded arms, scanning the vast abyss
That lay beneath him, rapt in soft repose;
He turn'd his eyes now heavenward—the chaste
moon
Was slowly rising, as the sun declined,
Casting its soft and mellow'd light o'er all
That wondrous waste of waters. Thus he stood,
The only living thing 'twixt sea and sky,
Communing with his thoughts; all hope was fled,
Despair was brooding in his lonely breast,
And yet he could not weep—the watery fount
Was all dried up, his lips were parch'd and dry,
His tongue clave to his mouth, his very breath
Was foul and pestilential,—yet he lived,
The only one of all the hapless crew.
Oh, tell him not of dangers in a storm,

For he had seen the sea run mountains high,
And yet felt fresh and buoyant ; he had braved
The sea in its most wild, ungovern'd mood,
And never felt his spirit quail. It pass'd,
And all was well again; not so a calm:
It hovers o'er the vessel, till her crew
Fall one by one, as leaves in autumn fall—
Dried up and wither'd—till one helpless wretch
At length is left in lonesome solitude,
To waste his hours of life in hopes and fears.
Oh, who can tell the agony of thought,
In such a solemn hour, that passes through
The brain of man, who thus stands forth alone,
In his own impotence, to plead his cause
And sue for mercy!—such dread thoughts must be
Sacred for ever, 'tween him and his God.

STANZAS ON HOPE.

Oh, Hope ! thou art the fairest, loveliest flower,
That ever blossom'd in the human breast ;
The choicest gift that bounteous Heaven can shower,
From the bright mansion of eternal rest,
Upon impotent man : thy radiant beams
Do play about the weary wand'rer's heart,
And mingle in sweet childhood's sunny dreams,
Robbing the keenest arrow of its smart,

Making this earth appear, to human eyes,
Equal in glory to the boundless skies
When Sol's bright beams at early morn do rise.

Go, watch the toiling slave, while to the oar
Securely chain'd, he labours life away!
While busy mem'ry through his brain doth pour,
Quick as his boat's prow dashes through the spray!
What is it dries the tear-drop in his eye,
And drives the furrows from his pallid brow?
'Tis Hope, that kindly beameth from on high,
And kindleth in his breast a fervent glow,
That speaks of what he erst was wont to be,
Ere doom'd to pine in chains and slavery,
And whispers, once again, he shall be free.

Mark the fond mother, as o'er her sick child
She trembling stands in speechless agony,
And gazes on the image undefiled
Of *Him*, whose throne is fix'd beyond the sky—
What is it sheds a glow o'er her fair face,
And re-illumes her eyes with lustrous light,
Casting a *halo* o'er each beauteous grace,
Which erst was shaded with the hue of night?—
'Tis Hope, that gift of *God*, whose radiance flies
Around her form, and sparkles in her eyes,
While heaves her bosom with unnumber'd sighs.
Mark the frail barque, as o'er the boiling surge
She madly rushes in her wild career,

While winds are howling forth the dismal dirge,
And mountain waves burst o'er the mariner:
He reels, he gasps, yet struggles to oppose
His fragile strength so impotently weak;
While his rude breast, with strong convulsive throes,
Heaves silently, as pallid grows his cheek;
His home, his wife, his children, all appear
Before his mental eye, and bid him cheer,
With glorious *Hope*, the heart bow'd down with fear.

Mark the frail remnant of mortality,
Whose wasted form proclaims he soon must die;
What is it cheers him in his agony,
And brings bright visions to his fancy's eye?—
'Tis Hope! that radiant star, which from on high
Doth shed its genial influence benign,
And lendeth to his dim and sunken eye
A melting softness, Hope's most welcome sign—
'Tis Hope, at length, hath touched his troubled brain,
And softly whispers, though his sins remain,
His deep repentance is not all in vain.

A SOLDIER ON THE FIELD OF WATERLOO,

THE NIGHT BEFORE, AND THE NIGHT AFTER THE BATTLE.

He stood alone!—and yet not all alone—
For Nature was around him; all was calm
And silent save the gentle wind, which sigh'd
And whistled through the far outstretching trees,
Whose giant limbs cast forth a darker shade
O'er the green surface of their mother earth,
While their high tow'ring forms soar'd in the air,
And hid themselves amid night's solemn gloom.
'Twas midnight, as alone he stood; his eyes
Were heav'nward turn'd; his thoughts had wander'd far
From earth, and all things earthly; and his soul
Was rapt in contemplation of the skies.
The moon rode high, amid the changing clouds,
Which ever and anon crossed o'er her disc,
And hid her from his anxious gaze. Again
She soared in modest grandeur from the gloom,
Casting a mellowing tint o'er all the earth.
The stars, those little gems of radiant light,
Like sparks of fire, burst out at intervals,
Revealing for a moment their bright hues,
And then again concealing all their charms,
Like to a blushing virgin, who recoils

In maiden modesty from man's rude gaze,
To nestle in her mother's gentle breast,
And hide her fears and blushes as they rise.
How beautiful and calm is silent night,
When Nature sleeps, and man alone stands forth,
To gaze upon the ever beauteous sky
And commune with his thoughts!—a holy calm,
Unfelt amid the turmoil of the day,
Doth spread itself around his every sense,
And teach him to bow down before his God
In silent thankfulness.
The soldier stood,
And cast his eyes far o'er the broad expanse
Of rich, luxuriant verdure, that was spread
O'er all thy open field, fair Waterloo!
Night waned away,—the day ran out its course.
Again he stood upon that fatal plain;
Alas! how changed in that brief space was all
The solemn beauty of that awful spot!
The earth, which erst was clothed in verdant green,
Now teem'd with human gore—the zephyr's sigh
Gave place to man's deep-breathed and mournful groans
Which floated in the air, amid the gloom
Of deep'ning night, which flung a sombre veil,
As 'twere in pity, o'er that scene of woe,
To hide from human eyes the mortal pangs
That rend asunder life's fast fleeting ties,
And waft the soul forth from the bleeding corse,
Leaving that godlike form, where once were health

And strength allied to potent powers of mind,
A fetid mass of foul, corrupted flesh,
Filling the air with noisome pestilence,
Fatal to all who move within its sphere.
And why should man thus slay his fellow man?
Is it because an all-wise God hath made
Too little space for all to live and breathe?
Or is't because the bounteous earth doth bear
Too little produce, that man must perforce
Destroy his fellow man, and stain his soul
With murd'rous blood? Alas, no! If it were,
There were a cause co-equal with effect.
Why then doth man, in war's rich panoply,
'Mid trumpets' sound, and cymbals' startling crash,
Rush like a demon on his armèd foes,
Deface their forms with wounds from glitt'ring steel,
And rob them of that life he could not give?
It is because ambition prompts the high
And mighty still to rise, though ev'ry step
Should tread on human necks, rend human hearts—
Make rivers run with human life-drops, till
The o'erpow'ring torrent carries in its course
A heavy burthen—a whole nation's tears!
Yes! 'tis ambition doth unleash the hounds
Of murd'rous Warfare; and for one man's gain
Ten thousand lives are sacrificed, the earth
Manured with human flesh and blood, the wife
Robb'd of her husband, mother of her son,
And children of their sires. That man must bear
A heavy load of guilt upon his soul

Who rashly plunges nations into war.
'Twas thus the soldier on that awful night
Soliloquized, while treading o'er the field
Where death had been so busy. He escaped
As 'twere by miracle—not e'en a scratch
Had reached his sinewy form ; and yet his sword
Was deeply stain'd with blood, e'en to the hilt.
He drew it forth, and gazing on it, knelt,
And poured forth to Heav'n a fervent pray'r,
That such a sight might ne'er again assail
His aching eyeballs ; then he raised the blade,
And press'd it to his burning lips. A tear
Fell from his moisten'd eye—a sacred drop,
Fresh from the stream of a most noble breast.
His prayer was heard. And not in vain was shed
Man's blood upon thy field, famed Waterloo ;
For victory crown'd the day. The eagle fell,
And never soar'd again. Its obsequies
Brought peace to ev'ry European shore.

DEAR LAND OF THE FREE.

Dear land of the free, when thy banner's unfurl'd,
We'll challenge with glee, the rest of the world;
For what foe can withstand
The glittering brand,
Which a warrior's hand

For freedom doth wield ;
While the drums loudly beat,
And the rival hosts meet,
To conquer or die on the dread battle-field !

Hurrah for our Queen, and the land of our birth !
No brighter is seen all over the earth.
May Victoria long reign,
Our rights to maintain ;
Though France, ay, or Spain,
With tyrants ally !
While her name is enshrined
In each true Briton's mind,
Proud tyrants or despots she well may defy.

Hurrah ! then, hurrah ! for the land of the free !
In peace, or in war, none greater shall be.
For our Queen and our laws,
In honour's just cause,
What Briton will pause
To conquer or die,
When that standard's unfurl'd
That hath challenged the world,
In the name of our Queen, and of dear liberty !

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